



*A* hat may be a tiny, transient thing but there is no age in woman when the Eve in her cannot be enhanced, her morale boosted, her spirits lifted by the right hat for the occasion. There have been hats that helped husbands win elections and hats that triumphantly opened bazaars, hats that brought down rivals and hats that launched battleships. And if the lady has chosen the tactics it is Aage Thaarup who, for many years, has devised the weapon.

The reminiscences of Aage Thaarup, who came from Denmark as a very young man, with neither capital nor connections, only a determination to become a milliner, are as light and entertaining, as colourful and gay as any of his hats. It is a tale of gossamer and tulle, of dreams coming true, of castles in Mayfair.

Mr Thaarup's first workers were tough, red-bearded Mohammedans, sitting cross-legged under an Indian sky and stitching to his design with incredible fidelity; for it was in India that he found his first opportunity to design hats for high society. Then back to London and tiny rooms on the third floor of No. 4 Berkeley Street. Soon he began making hats for film and stage stars, for Gloria Swanson and Marlene Dietrich, for Evelyn Laye and Vivien Leigh and Anna May Wong. And then came the first summons to Buckingham

Palace when, feeling like the tailor or the shoemaker in a fairy tale, he passed between the guardsmen in their bearskins, trod the red carpet along corridors lined with portraits of Queen Victoria to the apartments of the Queen of England. Mr Thaarup had arrived.

His delightful book is full of nostalgic memories: of the Five o'Clock Tea hats of the Twenties and the Six o'Clock hats of the war years; of a hat decorated with fresh Spring vegetables or a swirl of red and white knitting wool and a pair of knitting needles; of Rembrandt hats for Charles Laughton and a wimple for Elizabeth Bergner; of the Queen's hat for the Victory Parade and the hat for Princess Elizabeth at the Trooping the Colour; of the Churchill hats with which he celebrated the end of the war. Hats have projected him into many adventures and taken him down innumerable honey-suckle lanes. Now that he is back in a little house in Chelsea, his lovely Mayfair premises gone, Aage Thaarup forgets the sorrows of bankruptcy in the joys of creating even more hats. If his years of wonderful success have brought him no financial gain, they took him to the heights of ecstatic happiness, and his book is a reflection of the irrepressible gaiety of 'The Mad Hatter'.



## HEADS AND TALES





AAGE THAARUP

# HEADS & TALES

AAGE THAARUP

*in collaboration with*

DORA SHACKELL

*with a frontispiece and 16 pages of  
photographs*



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*Durga Sahakarmukhya* (The Durga),

NAINITAL.

दुर्गासाहकर्ममुखा (दुर्गा)

नैनताल

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TO MY PARENTS

'I can't go no lower,' said the Hatter.

'I am on the floor as it is. . . .'


*Alice in Wonderland*

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## CHAPTER I

 ADAM, I'm sorry, but it is sold.' My eyes were on the big Italian straw with its pale blue velvet ribbon, and pink cherry blossom. I hoped the customer would not notice the white lie. Badly though I needed the sixty rupees I meant to ask for this hat, I could not sell it to her.

She was a plump, little, old, and very platinum blonde. And the hat was a 'real pretty hat'. A 'man's' hat; all picture and charming—like an oil painting. It was made with native workmanship—not at all badly. And I loved it because, as a man, I loved big hats. But it is always dangerous to sell the wrong hat to a customer. Young as I was at that time, I already knew this.

But she came back next day; and I still needed those sixty rupees. I had to be strong-minded.

'Couldn't you copy it for me?' she asked.

'I haven't the straw; I haven't the ribbon; I haven't the cherry blossom, madam. I'm sorry.'

'Now why the *blazes* does she want that hat?' I asked myself when she came back a third time. It came to me suddenly; to this plump old lady my hat was not simply a hat, it was a hat to remind. A hat to evoke other days. I pictured her as she perhaps pictured herself. A young thing, lolling on plushy punt cushions, a big bewhiskered and bewildered Guards officer at the pole. And the wide-brimmed hat—the hat—filtering sunbeams on to cheeks blushing as prettily as the mock cherry blossom.

I let her have the hat . . . along with her dreams.

But this is hurrying too far ahead. This was one of the hats I sold in Bombay. But I must go further back to find



my first beginnings in millinery. If I ask myself what made me take up hats, I have to admit that nothing *made me*. Rather, it was millinery that took me up, so to speak.

So many people who go into Fashion, so many men especially, seem to have played with little bits of cloth, and dolls and pretty things when they were young; like my fellow-countryman, Hans Christian Andersen, who one hundred and fifty years ago played with toy theatres and went through all those fantasies with which he was later to entertain the world.

But I did not do anything like that. It is true I made one hat when I was six. I don't remember doing it at all, but it exists. It is a sort of treasure to my family in Copenhagen. I insist it came about quite accidentally, and I can make no claim for its being a sign of the first stirrings of artistic ambition. The hat is just a little bit of tulle and a feather. No dimensions, no crown, no brim; just flat like a pancake. It came about because of an aunt who worked as a milliner in a very good shop in Copenhagen. Sometimes I met her coming from work. Once, when my parents were away, I stayed with her. And so it was that I had my first introduction to a workroom. Naturally, all the ladies in the workroom were very kind to such a little boy; and with all those instruments and things to play with, what little boy would not have produced a hat? Mine, I think, showed no promise at all, even for a six-year-old. Certainly, I forgot all about it, and after that did not think about hats at all—until Fate took the reins again.

Perhaps I do remember that, even at this early age, when my mother had some nice clothes, I liked them. Some of my earliest memories are of the soft feel of a piece of satin; or the lovely colour or delicacy of a piece of lace, or the smell of perfume—all those feminine things that make up elegance.

But, though I liked these things, they didn't play much part in my childhood. What occupied me was school, and football and swimming. I wasn't particularly industrious at school, but I must have been fairly quick-witted, for I always

passed high in my class. My ambitions certainly had nothing to do with fantasies in tulle.

I was thirteen when a big piece of bad luck came my way; and at football, which I liked so much. A misplaced kick, and my leg crumpled. It meant an operation—and afterwards crutches and a bathchair. What tragedy! At thirteen suffering can be very intense, especially when one loses all the things one cares for. But, looking back now, I know that some good came out of this hardship. It is not such a bad thing at that age to learn patience and tolerance. And perhaps too, it was then that those first seeds of compassion for the young and helpless were sown. Later in life when I was able, I was the more ready to help some young people who needed help.

But back to my crutches. I was lucky. I had some good pals. Since I could not myself move around they took me. Oh, we were good pals. They threw me into the water and they took me out. They took me on the switchback and held my hand so that I should not fall off.

And my teachers were good to me too. They came out to the hospital, bringing me books, and they stayed and talked. They were anxious that I should still pass my exams, and I myself meant to do so, too. So I read by myself. And, perhaps, that way, I learned a little more than just what was between the two covers of the books.

I must pay tribute to those teachers, especially my old mathematics teacher. She admired me because I showed a certain amount of guts, and it made her want to help me the more. And the German teacher; and the English teacher, too. In turn they all came to the hospital and worked very hard to help me, a badly damaged little fellow, to pass my exams. And with all this help perhaps it was not so surprising that I passed with top marks in the school.

And then, at my parents' request, I had to make up my mind what to do. Well, my Muse must have been fast asleep, because what I really wanted was to be a school-teacher, or to study theology. But my parents were not wealthy enough for either of these careers. So I got a grant to go

to a commercial school; a one year's course in Copenhagen. I was fifteen, and still on crutches, but not letting it handicap me too much.

I remember how I used to leave my home in the morning for the commercial school. I always caught the tram at the last moment—I was quite good at that. First I used to throw one crutch on to the tram, in front with the driver, then jump on just as the tram was moving.

Again, more by good luck than hard work, I won the first prize although I hated some of the subjects, especially bookkeeping.

And now, my Muse woke up.

The President of the commercial school was also the President of the biggest and most elegant fashion store in Copenhagen. Fonnesbeck's was the store, and the President—rather smartly, I think—offered to the best boy of the year a job in the store. And so I was automatically offered this job. I went to see the personnel manager.

Here was my first interview. Now surely the golden gates of opportunity would open. Alas, they remained stubbornly locked! A worse affront still, the only job they had just then for an apprentice was in the ladies' hat department.

Ladies' hats! I thought of my pals. No, I just couldn't do it. What a ninny they would think me if I took this job! So I would have nothing to do with it. I went home to my parents and my brothers—there were two younger than myself and one older. I was very fond of my family and we lived very happily together. But my parents were not well off, and as my father listened to me in silence I realized it had not been very nice of me to reject this job. Because it *was* the best store in Copenhagen, and no doubt there would be a future there for me if I worked hard.

My parents did not force me at all; they just said I was a bit hasty because surely it was only a joke about the ladies' hats, only temporary. Nobody could want to keep me in ladies' hats; I would surely move into the silks department quite soon. Wouldn't it be better to accept for the time being? I went back the next day.

And I blushed, and I blushed, and I blushed. For about a fortnight.

One day, instead of blushing, I began really to look, and feel, and think. . . . Perhaps there was something in hats. Most of the time all I did was to dust hats, and move around artificial flowers and things like that. What I liked most was the lunch hour when all the sales girls and ladies were away and only one was left, sitting by the cash box, totting up figures. Then I had time to stare, time to think. But I was happier still when the closing bell rang.

Well, in this way, I was launched in hats. Three years' apprenticeship and, at the end, I would be qualified as a millinery buyer. At this stage, could I have looked into the future, I think I should have found it hard to believe all the wonderful things the picture showed. For I was a youth with only a quite ordinary background, not unintelligent, I suppose, but handicapped by my accident. Perhaps I had a bit of an aptitude for learning, a flair for languages, but lots of boys have that. And yet, as I now know, Fate was going to be very kind to me. But perhaps I had just one talent which really helped me. An insatiable interest in things and people. And as a camel is said to store water and food for the journey ahead, so did my curiosity and interest in the life about me help me on my own journey.

Here I was then, trying to open doors to knowledge of things almost before I was high enough to reach to the key-hole. My hours were from 8.30 in the morning to 6.30 at night for six days of the week. The store stayed open even later on Saturday evening. My wages were twenty-five shillings a month for the first year, fifty shillings a month for the second year and in the third year seventy-five shillings a month. Not much! But already I was trying to save, for I harboured a dream that one day I would go abroad.

I took sandwiches for my lunch; and again for my supper, to eat before going to language class. When it was warm I chewed them in a little park just near the school.

My foot was not healed, yet, to save the tram fare, I would walk home. Of course at that age, I was romantic,

and I can recall, even now, the strange pleasure of walking home alone under the moon. In such ways I added to that little bit of money, which one day would take me abroad.

I made a little more money by doing sketches for hair-dressing advertisements. Permanent waving had just started and the barbers were waking up. I was not very good at drawing, but I stole a bit from a magazine and added a bit from my imagination, and somehow my sketches sold. Every shilling earned in this way, and later in some coaching, was put away. The coaching happened because my old mathematics teacher asked if I could help with one or two backward pupils. My firm allowed me to do this, and there I was teaching at my old school the thing at which I was the worst in the world. Mathematics! I did teach English too, and I shall never forget that primer from which all little Danish girls and boys learn their first English. 'I can hop; I can run; see me hop; see me run; that is fun, fun, fun.'

At the end of six months, I was allowed a short holiday, so, with the money I had saved, and with some other boys, and taking our bicycles, I set off for Germany. It was my first sight of that country, and the taste was exciting. Berlin, Heidelberg. My appetite was more than ever whetted.

Back to Copenhagen, the night school, and into my little strait-jacket in the hat department. It was the off-season between spring and autumn, for women in those days bought one hat when the sun came out and another when the first snowflake fell. How different later! With my hats selling in England, in Australia, in Iceland and in Peru, there was always a hat season.

I stood in that hat department amongst the few customers there, and almost willed myself another trip abroad. How it was to come about I did not know, but the first step seemed obvious. To Save More Money.

When they were not busy in the hat department, I used to go down into the basement where the stocks were kept.

Here were hundreds of imported hats. Hats from Germany, hats from England, Luton especially. How curious it seems now when I have so many good friends there. In those days it was simply a name on an invoice. Or on a brown-paper parcel, as vaguely distant as Timbuctu.

I picked up a box to read the address more easily. Then I saw writing: 'Will the person who opens these boxes kindly remove the stamps from the outside of the box and return to this address?' It was like a message from Mars. I carefully steamed off the stamps and took them home. In my best trade-school English I wrote back:

'DEAR SIR,

I enclose the stamps which you asked to be returned. I enclose also a few old Danish stamps. In return, would you very kindly start corresponding with me because I am learning English and I would very much like to write it colloquially and one day speak it colloquially?'

A few days later a letter came back. . . . 'I am 63 . . . I am afraid I should not have much to write about to a youngster like you. . . . But I will try to find someone. . . .' So a little later I received a letter from a young James Stephens, and from then on we corresponded.

Now it is always at lunch-time that I am lucky. My supervisor had been to Paris and thence to London, and had come back full of enthusiasm for the Wembley Exhibition. By now I had been with my firm for over a year and was entitled to another holiday. Also I had amassed the sum of six pounds, and so I wrote to my young correspondent.

'I would so like to come to London. I have six pounds. A return ticket will cost me three pounds fifteen shillings. Do you think you could please make inquiries at the Y.M.C.A. in Tottenham Court Road, and find out how much it will cost, to sleep and eat, and take a bus to Wembley?'

Across the seas in London it was lunch-time, and James was reading my letter over his sandwich and cup of tea, when his boss went by. And the boss was my Mr. X—though I did not know this at the time.

'How are you getting on with your correspondent in Denmark?' he asked.

'Oh, I've just had a letter from him this morning, sir.'

Well, that was another slice of luck for me. The next thing I knew was an invitation from the boss himself. 'My wife and I would like you to be *our* guest for as long as you like,' he wrote. And I still did not know he was Jimmy's boss.

What did I do next? By rights, I was entitled to only nine days' holiday, and the whole journey would take me six days. But I wanted to go so much. I had not told my family; I had not told anyone, and did not know what to say to my employers. But I had remembered something my old grandfather once said. 'If you want anything, go to the top.' So I did go to the top. I asked for an appointment to see the very head of the firm—the same, the President of the commercial school, who had given me my job in the beginning. A little later I was summoned.

With my heart in my mouth I went up to see this old gentleman—and he was a real gentleman. Very Danish, very tall, with a handsome moustache. Very Christian the Ninth. Really he was a charming man, but it did not prevent me from feeling nervous. I explained the situation. I told him about the stamps, and the correspondence, and how I wanted to go to the Wembley Exhibition. And then, quite boldly, I said that I wanted a fortnight for this.

'But, young man, these stamps belonged to the firm. This is quite serious. . . . I shall have to think this over. . . . Will you please come back at four o'clock.'

I was in tears.

Back in the mahogany board-room at four o'clock, I stood to attention. There had been a board meeting which, in my ignorance, I thought was about me, and everyone looked most censorious. It was ominous. But here is a curious thing. Many Danes have a Germanic streak in them. They know how to pull someone's leg and they love doing it.

'We think it was very improper of you to appropriate the

stamps. These stamps were the property of the firm. . . . Nevertheless . . . we have pleasure in giving you a fortnight's holiday and ten pounds for the journey.'

How everyone *gaped* that night when we all sat round the green lamp that was the symbol of our family, and I broke the news. They did not believe it!

But the day actually came for me to pack my few things. My dear old grandfather had had the only really serviceable piece of luggage in the family. It was a basket—nearly fifty years old now, with an iron bar through it and two padlocks on the end. Aage was going abroad, and naturally he must have the family piece of luggage!

Off I set, by train across Denmark, and finally clambered up to the boat. I had been to the south and I had been east, and all my family had done that too. But nobody had travelled west—west across the North Sea to England. And I do not know why, but that is what I longed to do. And here I was doing it. I got to Harwich, and then to Liverpool Street Station. And to this day, I love Liverpool Street Station. It is dirty, it is full of smoke, it cannot compare with, say, Waterloo, but I love it.

It was raining as the train neared the station, but my head had been out of the window looking and looking. I had sent ahead of me an amateur photograph of myself, and arranged to hold a little Danish flag. And my hostess had agreed to hold a Union Jack. So I was using all my eyesight long before we steamed into the station, and my little flag was wet and bedraggled. But there was my hostess, so British looking, with brown eyes, a centre parting and a raincoat. And her Union Jack a little sad too. But the spirit was there.

Of course I forgot all my English in the excitement, so we talked in German. We went through those strange Metropolitan arches and down to that mysterious thing I had never seen before, an Underground station. I thought she must be the most intelligent woman ever; chopping and changing, with nothing more than the directions of a few painted hands. We got to Euston and then into a train that



took us to Berkhamsted. And there was a nice car, and a chauffeur, and a house on top of a hill. And *suddenly* . . . I saw it all. Of course, Mr. X was the managing director of James's firm.

Next morning—my first English breakfast! Brought to me in bed, too. And, such touching kindness, some Danish papers, two days old, that they had purchased in London.

And I had been told the English were 'cold'. (I did not know then that everyone on the Continent is told that!)

We went to London. To Kensington Gardens, the Long Walk, Peter Pan, the Albert Hall and, of course, the Albert Memorial. How impressive I thought this. Later on, when I made my home in London, I followed the silly fashion of ridiculing this work. But now, again, I turn to it as a wonderfully impressive piece.

I loved the red buses, the Underground railway, the immense stores. I was taken to the theatre and saw Sybil Thorndike in Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. And that was unforgettable. And I went to the Palladium and saw another great artist, Nellie Wallace, playing Juliet to Billy Merson's Romeo.

At Wembley I stared and stared, and thought it all very wonderful. There was a model posing as Cleopatra. She had a snake round her and I thought her very lovely. How should I know that we should meet again? But we did—nearly fifteen years later when I was giving a hat show, because of the bombing, outside London. It was in Liverpool, and I wanted a model not quite so young—a little more bosom, a little more poise. I engaged a charming lady (my taste had not altered, you see) and when we talked in the train we discovered that it was she who had posed as Cleopatra. And then she told me that one day, the snake had escaped and coiled itself on top of the cash box. And of course nobody could be paid that night.

What a thrilling experience my first visit to London was! Then back to Copenhagen and the hats. I celebrated by saving up and buying myself a black jacket and striped trousers. If I had worn a hat I would have had a bowler!

The time came when my three years' apprenticeship was finished. Like all youth, I was in a hurry. I had learned a lot, but I knew I must move on to learn more. Hats I still regarded somewhat dispassionately, but there was the beginning—just the beginning of a fashion sense. I remember that it was then that I made my first fashion attack on a woman—my dear mother. I wanted her to wear short hair in the new way, and I wanted her to wear silk stockings. 'Never' was her answer. She never did cut her hair, but in the end she did capitulate over the silk stockings.

When I had decided to leave Copenhagen there came the inevitable interview with the head of my firm. What did I want to do?

'I want to go abroad, sir.' Again the gates opened just sufficiently for me to creep through. It was arranged that I should receive a grant, partly from the Commercial Association of Copenhagen, and partly from my firm, to send me to Germany. I was found a job in a rather old-fashioned and rather beautiful old firm. It was right in the middle of Berlin.

Now arrived the moment, the very first moment of independence. I was just eighteen and a half. It was quite wonderful to be on my own; to have a room of my own; to be a man. Even now, I can still recapture the thrill, still recall that first feeling of individuality; that first sniff of freedom.


And those pyjamas. Until now, I had always lived at home with my three brothers and my beloved parents. We were very close and very fond of one another. But there was not much money at home, and not very much room. Like any other Danish family, I had always shared a room with my three brothers. Four little beds, and four nightshirts. And even at that age—and it was so in those days—a little embroidered collar done by my grandmother, on each nightshirt. But no pyjamas.

But I was going to Berlin! Now I could buy myself a pyjama suit. And what pyjamas! They were pale blue, with a touch of yellow and white. They were magnificent. I packed them in my bag with loving care.

It was night when I arrived in Berlin at the Stettiner Bahnhof, and went across to the Stettiner Hotel, where I had a little room reserved, on the top floor. It was at the very, very back. I undressed, I put on my pyjamas, and I looked at myself, and I said 'W-E-L-L!' Next morning, in those striped pyjamas, with no dressing-gown, because I had not been able to afford one, I walked from the fifth floor right down to the basement to get shaved—whatever there was to shave—and I walked right back again. And everyone looked after me.

I thought, 'They must be dam' smart pyjamas, since they look so much.'

## CHAPTER II

HOSE pyjamas! And those early days in Berlin. The new feeling of independence bubbled in me like champagne. I was young and alive. I was free to look and to listen, to explore and to taste. It was a heady draught.

That was in my leisure. But in my job there was very little change. Still dusting hats. Still arranging hats. Still packing hats. And never *making* hats. Not a hint of that.

Now, looking back through my scrapbooks, it all seems a bit of a miracle. That mountain of hats I have since made. The acres of felt and bales of straw I have used. The flowers and the fruits. Yes, and even the vegetables. Enough for an army!

And all those hat shows! In London, in Paris, in New York, in Melbourne, in Sydney, in Brisbane. And in a dozen different provincial centres all over Britain.

The silly hats, the lovely hats, the important hats. The wicked hats. Hats that made history. Hats that bloomed in high places in the world's capitals. Hats that I created to blush almost unseen in far-away deserts. Hats that circled the world in aeroplanes, that charmed the world on celluloid. Hats that won sweethearts. Hats that broke hearts, and hats that restored married happiness. Hats that got plain women jobs, and beautiful women into the peerage.

There have been hats that were sentimental and utterly feminine. Some I have tried to make truly beautiful. Some I created for dignity. I have sought the witty appeal, I have looked for ways picturesquely to portray woman's challenge to current events. With my tongue in my cheek I have made surrealist bits of nonsense. With my heart in my mouth I have launched daring new lines.

And of course—let me confess it—I have made hats quite simply for sensation value. Hats to please those charming ladies of the Press to whom I owe so much for help, co-operation, and not least friendship. How these nice ladies do love a 'shocker'. Make a hat as big as a cartwheel and it's news. Or if it is no more than a piece of wire and a bird's wing, that's news too!

But if all these hats I have created have been different, one thing I tried to give them all—a life of their own. There are hats; and there is head-gear. If you live in Siberia I suppose you must choose head-gear, something entirely functional.

But I like a hat to have a thought behind it. That is why, when I give a show today, I like to tell the story behind each hat. And I like a hat that truly studies a woman's personality. Most women have some idea of how a line here, and a line there, and the right colour, can do something to flatter them. But what fun it is when their acquaintances exclaim: 'My dear . . . I didn't recognize you.'

And it is all due to the hat!

When I think of all those hats and hat shows, and then recall those days in the hat department of the Berlin store, I am a bit shocked to remember what little part I was allowed in its essential fashion life. I might almost as well have been selling ice-creams, or boots.

Nowadays, I make a point of including all my staff, from the work-girls down to the messenger boy, in any show which will help them in their work. To give young people the opportunity to develop their artistic ability seems only good sense to me.

When, for instance, a few years ago I became Chairman of the Associated Millinery Designers of London, though it was quite revolutionary, I insisted that when we gave a show there must be a rehearsal, however higgledy-piggledy, and that not only my staff and that of the other milliners were invited, but some students from the technical and art schools. I like to foster talent wherever it is. And I am sure it is right that my staff should see the finish of their

work; see how the hats are presented, and share some of the fun.

Even with an individual hat I often think the girl who makes it deserves a bit of credit. Sometimes a hat is a rather special one, and perhaps at the last fitting the customer loves it.

'Do you mind, madam, if I call down the little lady who made it?' I ask.

'Not at all.'

And when I have introduced the two, I think they both feel pleasure. The girl who stitched the hat is thrilled to see it on, and the customer likes to say, 'Thank you.'

There is, of course, another side to things. If I take an interest in the young people who work for me, I expect some enthusiasm from them. This is not something one can demand, but it is something quite vital in a small business such as mine. And more often than not I do get wonderful enthusiasm from the young people who work with me.

But there—I am rushing ahead again when I should be in Berlin. All the old routine of dusting, arranging and packing, almost submerged in the sea of hats. Feathered hats, flowered hats, big shady hats, flower-pot hats. Boxes and paper bags for hats. Important names, nondescript names. Fine addresses, humble ones, all buying hats.

The hats tumbled in and out of boxes, were whisked on and off customers' heads. The sheets of tissue paper whispered like the salesgirls as I laid it under and round the purchases. I got along with the endless business of packing, unpacking and carrying, I hope quite competently, but without any great opportunity to distinguish myself. It was after work that I was striking out.

Remember, it was Berlin, 1926. It was a time when all sorts of new ideas were stirring. Hope for a new world was blossoming. It was to be a wonderful world. A young people's world, too. Now I was meeting a different sort of person. More sophisticated, more stimulating.

One of my new acquaintances, who became a great

friend, was Klaus Mann, a young playwright and son of Thomas Mann, the great humanist. His sister Erica was a great friend of mine; later she went to America and married Auden. There was Pamela Wedekind, now the greatest actress in Germany. All that crowd of young people; a little bit younger than myself, a little bit older. These people, the intellectual crowd, the young artists, became my friends. For me it was a new climate. You might call this crowd Bohemian—I don't know if they really were. But it was all wonderfully stimulating. I went to theatres, to the dress rehearsals, I got to know a lot of people. I met Elizabeth Bergner there and Reinhardt.

And did I at that time dream that one day I should make hats for a young and very beautiful Queen? That perhaps I would one day make her one of the most publicized hats ever designed by a milliner? Not at all. Something was perhaps just stirring, I was interested in hats just a little more. That was all. But I loved the life in Berlin.

It was a big period, those 1920's. Probably one of the most creative periods. Certainly it was a good time to be growing up in. And I was in the middle of the stream, making friends, making interesting friends and loving it.

I saw my first French impressionist paintings and they were explained to me. Somebody talked to me about Japan, the philosophy of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard was discussed—things I had never known of or guessed. Stresemann was the Foreign Minister and, miracle on miracle, he preached friendship among the nations. French boys came to Germany, Japanese people were there, English people were there. Thomas Mann went to France to lecture. Everywhere you heard, 'This is the New World.'

And all the young people believed it. Wars were finished. Militarism was finished. Brotherhood and equality were words in every mouth. No one could have dreamt then how it would all change in a short ten years.

Thinking back, again I must pay tribute to my school. What a wonderful help it was to have had an education in languages. My school German did me very well, and even

though I rarely speak German now, I can still read it tolerably well.

Presently I was going on, on this grant from Copenhagen, to Paris. I had been in Berlin for about three months, and the month was April. I was to leave on the twenty-seventh, and as my birthday was two days later, my friends gave a little party for me. Instead of a present, they gave me a sum of money, and to this sum was attached a jocular condition. The condition was that it must be used for something of which my mother would not approve.

As I had promised my mother that I would never go up in an aeroplane, this seemed the most appropriate bit of devilment. First I went by train to Cologne—and took the chance of looking around. I went on to Essen and Darmstadt, and saw different places there. Then on through Alsace to Brussels. And of course all these new places and people were like wine to me. At Brussels I booked a seat in a 'plane to Paris. That was in the days when the aeroplanes had open cabins and the Brussels airport was a tin shed. I went aboard, and in the 'plane were two cute American girls. Already I was living up to the conditions of the gift. But as if really to shock my mother, when we arrived in Paris I was photographed stepping down with a girl on each arm!

My job in Paris was with a Maison Lewis, a very famous old firm of those days in the Rue Royale. There was a gentleman called M. Lewis; also his brother-in-law, M. Gaston, who looked like a little bird fallen out of the nest. A very strict little bird he was too for he pushed me right up to the top floor in the stock room. The French were then—and I am sorry to say I still find them a little the same—rather jealous of teaching their trades to young people from abroad. But there was I working with a gentleman who changed his jacket, oh, just like the typical Parisian in a French film. He actually had a quill behind his ear, and an alpaca jacket to change into. But at lunch-time he went out, and then the stock room was my own. And there I had to stay, tidying up and painting numbers on boxes, and seeing nothing of hats. I was rather dejected.



But always it is at lunch-time that things happen to me, then I am always lucky. So there I was when the telephone rang. It was one of those funny old telephones on a stem. I took the call.

'Would you please bring down that new roll of royal blue velvet from Lyons that has just arrived. No, no, not that. Such and such a roll.'

Remember, I was on the top floor, and I took this big roll of velvet on my somewhat inadequate shoulders and marched down the stairs. At the very bottom were the salons. There was a long series of them, right along the Rue Royale from the corner of the Rue St. Honoré. All in the old style, and all so beautiful. And far, far away at the other end was a lady sitting with her back to me, with such beautiful shoulders and such wonderful clothes. On I marched, looking for the *vendeuse* or whoever was serving this lady. There seemed nobody around, and by now the lady had turned to me.

'Ah ça, c'est pour moi?'

'Mais oui, madame,' I said, unrolling the velour for her to feel.

'Ça me va?' she asked, taking a little bit across her and looking in the mirror.

'Non, madame. C'est trop bleu.'

Then the lady smiled at me; and at the same moment my boss and the *vendeuse* came in. And nearly killed me.

'Oh, non, non, non, non,' they said as they shooed me away.

The lady was Queen Ena of Spain!

But Queen Ena only laughed. '*J'aime le petit garçon, il est amusant.*' And afterwards, whenever she came, she always asked for '*Ce petit Danois*'—that was me. And years and years after that, when she came to live in Paddington—by that time I had a tiny showroom in Berkeley Street—she came and bought hats from me. And I delivered them personally by bus to Paddington.

Soon I was back in Copenhagen, very dejected.

It was the same store, the same work. And almost the same salary as before.

Only the hats had changed a little. And now I was beginning to understand the subtleties of line, the difference between a hand-made hat and a mass-produced one, the vulgar or chic way of trimming it.

It was the cloche era, and though it is so long ago, I still feel some regard for it. It made a frame for the face. In profile, it gave continuity of line to the whole figure. Not exactly a flirtatious hat, but it did have something coquettish about it. And in those days the materials were superb. Jewel-coloured velours of depth and opulence. Real silk ribbons.

But now I wanted to be somewhere where I could begin to express my own feelings about hats. Here, I might work—I might strive. But as an employee I could see no future.

So I laid my plans.

It had been good to see my family again, yet, like any young bird that has once tried its wings, I could not return to the old nest. So on returning to Copenhagen I had taken a little room down by the harbour. I had done it up a bit, and made it my own. It was somewhere to eat and sleep, and entertain my friends.

Now I had to pack my bag once more, for my plan was ready. I gave notice to my landlady, bought a ticket to London, and I told nobody.

It was Saturday and sale time, and the store windows were all to be re-dressed for the late-night crowds. Hundreds of hats, all very reduced in price, I had to arrange in the window, all the time hugging my secret. I was leaving my job that night.

The windows finished, I put on my coat. Partly through force of habit I went round to the front of the shop to see the effect.

Just one space unfilled.

Back I went, up to the second floor, found a hat and put it plumb in the middle of the window. My final gesture.

Years were to pass before I saw that window again. By that time I was established and good friends with the new directors. But I could never look at that window without

wondering what young chap had dressed it. And what would become of him.

In the morning I bought a little posy of lilies-of-the-valley and had it sent to my mother with my love. Then the train took me away with my small belongings and my very large hopes. Crossing the Sound, the ferry was breaking ice. I held my arms across my chest to fend off the sharp wind. And I thought how symbolic it all was, the ferry-boat and that ice.

I, too, had to break through somehow.

Back at dear old Liverpool Street again I 'phoned some friends.

'It's Aage. It's me. I'm in London!'

My English friends were so kind to me. They met me and found me a room in Victoria. I was thrilled to be back. I sat down to compose a very difficult letter.

. . . I was sorry to leave my work without explanation. I hoped that when I had made good, one day I should be able to return their kindness. . . .

And then I went round London looking for a job. If I know London almost as well as a cockney taxi-driver, it is not surprising. I marched from east to west, from north to south. And it rained, it rained and it rained. And I was miserable. I was a foreigner and not really entitled to work in London, and jobs seemed scarcer than winter sunshine. At last, in desperation, I wrote to my old firm in Berlin, and they kindly gave me an introduction to a small wholesale firm near Oxford Circus.

Not many pounds a week, but enough to manage on. Hats to dust, hats to arrange, hats to pack. The old formula. Then one day the boss said: 'You had better try to sell some hats.'

It might have been *frustrating* merely to dust, arrange and pack hats, but it was certainly the most *heartbreaking* thing to walk through London with a paper bag filled with some quite nice hats, very reasonably priced too, yet not be able to get past the inquiry office to show them to a buyer.

I walked, I trudged, I limped.

But a day came when I was promised an interview in Knightsbridge. It was a beautiful spring morning, the park flowers were gay, the children playing. I sniffed hope on that spring breeze. I walked boldly up the stairs.

But again they would not see me.

Back down the stairs, across to the park, too dazed almost to feel my old wound. I sat on a seat. Everything looked so beautiful. And so hard. It was too much.

I just burst into tears.

When I got back to Oxford Circus, the manager had just returned from Paris, and had brought back with him one especially nice new hat. It was a red felt cloche studded with a lot of steel spots. It was a real cloche, 1928 style. And I loved it.

By the following week the hat had been copied, partly hand-made, partly steam blocked. I do not remember the price, but I do remember that when it was given to me I felt quite confident that I could really make a sale.

I sped to Dickens & Jones. This time I was allowed to enter the millinery department. The buyer was a big, handsome woman.

'Madam,' I said, 'I have wanted to see you for so long. Here is something really beautiful.'

She took the hat out, examined it silently. Then she gave me an order for a hundred hats.

And the angels sang. I ran back to Oxford Circus. The boss was out, and I was dying to give the good news.

Presently he did come in. He, too, had a paper bag. He, too, had sold the hat—to a competitor of Dickens & Jones. There was nothing for it but to return to Dickens & Jones and explain the situation and cancel the contract. Years afterwards, when I was doing well in London, I got to know this buyer very well. She reminded me of the incident. 'There were tears in your eyes,' she said.

That summer was very lovely. Lots of sunshine and warmth. Only, in my heart, a little bleakness. I *loved* London. I laid myself at her feet. But she was hard to conquer.

One day in a Chelsea restaurant I had got into conversation with some young fellows on leave from India. One of them was A.D.C. to Sir Stanley Jackson, then Governor of Bengal. We talked about India, and the possibilities of selling hats out there to the then considerable white population. We exchanged addresses.

The summer went by, winter came. One foggy November day I was feeling particularly blue. Again there seemed a brick wall in front of me. Somehow I must scale it. Or bore through it. Or knock it down. But how?

I sometimes think there is something in this sort of temper which attracts opportunity. Or perhaps it is that the perceptions become heightened and possibilities only hazily glimpsed become clear indications. It was just then that I ran into my chance acquaintance, the A.D.C.

'You could make a good thing of hats if you came to India. Why don't you?'

'Because I have only one pair of trousers and no savings.'

'Why not borrow the money?'

It was crazy. It was a frightful risk. It was tempting providence. But two days later I had borrowed two hundred pounds, and booked a passage to India. I hurried across to Denmark to see my parents; and then to Berlin, where I got together a few dozen hats and some materials from my old firm. From thence to Marseilles to catch the ship for Bombay.

I had booked first class, and perhaps that was the wisest thing about this crazy project, for I met some charming people aboard, including Sir Edwin Lutyens, who was very kind to me. What was more, with the luck of the devil, one of the first people I ran into was a young man whom I had known in England, a teacher. On this trip he was teaching the children of the famous and beautiful Maharanee of Cooch Behar. The Maharanee was travelling in style with a whole series of cabins on the top deck for the children, the nannies and servants. Those were the days when India and Money were almost synonymous. Through my friend I was invited to meet the Maharanee. Her Highness was kind enough to ask me about my hat-selling scheme.

Perhaps it was the craziness of my project that appealed to her. Or perhaps just my youth and inexperience. Whatever it was, I shall always be grateful to this very lovely lady. She took me under her wing; she launched me on my first real solo flight, right there on the ship.

It was important, the Maharancee decided, that I should meet all the passengers. The fashionable thing just then was the Frankfurter party. So a Frankfurter party was organized and at this party was born the idea that I should give a hat show—part of the proceeds to go to a sailor's charity.

Was it in aid of one-legged sailors, or one-eyed sailors? I cannot remember, but I do know that it was for this party that I made my first hat.

There were several very charming ladies on board, and it was a rather amusing diversion. But though I felt confident that I could design a hat, I could not sew (I still cannot). However, with the help of some of these ladies, who I really think rather enjoyed this little insight into the workroom side of millinery, I produced quite a gay little collection. Anyhow, it was a success, and it removed one very horrid anxiety. I now had enough to pay the customs duty on my stock.

The Majestic was not the very best hotel in Bombay, but it was very good in those days. I had my stock of materials and still a few hats from Germany, and some of those made on board ship. I was in good spirits. Without wasting time I installed myself.

A wash-basin, a fan, a big brassy bedstead, a mosquito net, a writing-desk, one chair, a double cupboard and a lot of cockroaches. That was my office, home and sales-room.

For a few rupees I bought some blue cotton material to curtain off the wash-basin and the bed. I hung my clothes in one half of the cupboard. (First the precious, and so necessary, dinner jacket.) I lined the shelves on the other side of the cupboard and carefully arranged my hats. Then, with the writing-desk and the chair strategically placed in front of the curtain, I was ready for the first customer of my very own.

### CHAPTER III

**A**S soon as I arrived in Bombay, I wrote to Lady Sykes, the Governor's wife, asking if I might bring my collection of hats to Government House.

The answer came back: 'Yes, Lady Sykes would be very pleased.' So, piling my hats into a taxi, I bowled off along the colourful streets, my black-bearded Sikh driver rolling his eyes to left and right and hooting imperiously as though I were the Governor himself.

Probably I sold only a couple of hats to Lady Sykes that day, but it was a beginning and I went away glowing. My Sikh driver, catching my mood, flashed a smile as gleamingly white as his elaborate, pristine turban.

Actually, excellent though this start was, the account thus opened was to give me more than immediate pleasure. Long, long afterwards, when her husband had retired from the Governorship and they had come to live in England, Lady Sykes asked me if I would again make her hats. What a pleasure!

If I am asked, today, what kind of woman I most like making hats for, I have to admit—though I am not firm about it—I do especially enjoy making hats for ladies who are no longer very young, but who still show an interest in fashion.

Sometimes a lady for whom time has rather slipped by will take a long, hard look at herself in her mirror, and then decide: 'I'll have a shot at a new hat.' And quite often the charm works.

I remember one lady, jolly and very nice, but with just that little bit of fadedness, that little air of unhappiness

*The author's father, aged  
nineteen*



*His mother at the same age*





*Aage Thaarup (centre front) with his  
three brothers. Copenhagen, 1912*

around her which even the wives of successful men sometimes wear. I made her a hat, and I fitted it, and I delivered it to her. And she came in to me next day beaming!

'Do you know what! I met my husband for lunch in town, and he didn't even look at the paper!'

After my visit to Government House in Bombay, customers began to arrive like magic at my little room in the Majestic. Soon I was running out of materials. One day a lady came with a request to match a frock of a rather unusual colour. Of course, I could not match it. That is when I began to visit the bazaars. It was exciting. I would take the tram from the Taj Mahal Hotel, right past the Army and Navy Stores (now, alas, no more) and a few other European shops. And then I dived right down into the native quarter. I had often read glowing descriptions of the oriental scene, but not until one has seen that fantasy of piled-up mountains of colour and the endless press of human beings can one begin to understand.

I knew I would not get a piece of felt; I would not get a French straw. I simply had to look for anything in the colour, whether it was cotton, a silk sari or a peacock feather. As long as it matched the colour.

And I learned a great deal from this search. It was rather like a game. Sometimes I could find the colour but not the weight of material necessary, or the texture. Often the ladies who came out to India brought with them suits in tweed or worsted, and though I might easily find the right colour amongst the many-hued saris, even if I cut away the embroidery the material was still not suitable.

So I started experimenting with the colouring of materials. If I covered myself in dye on one or two occasions, I hope I covered my hat in glory. Today, of course, we have wonderful spraying machines—aniline sprays. What a godsend they would have been in those days.

The travel 'bug' did not leave me tranquil for long. I itched to move on, so one day I packed my hats and my belongings and crossed India to Calcutta. Soon I was doing quite well. I made enough rupees to get together a few

native tailors to increase my stock of hats and then my caravan rolled off for Delhi.

The only hotel where I could get in seemed rather off the map, away from the main road on the outskirts near Viceregal Lodge. It was rather disappointing.

However, I heard there was to be a big garden party at Viceregal Lodge in three days' time, but the next day there was news which not only cast a gloom on everything but sent some of the ladies into a flutter. Marie Christine, the Queen Mother of Spain, had died and, since she was of British descent, Court mourning was declared.

And, of course, nobody had anything black to wear.

I hurried to put an advertisement in the local paper. I cannot think why, but in those days I called myself Monsieur—it sounded more professional to my unsophisticated ear.

'Monsieur Thaarup has just arrived from London and Paris and brought with him a beautiful collection of hats. For mourning.'

Then I went out and engaged a 'boy', and found two native tailors, and I set them to work. We worked all day. We worked all night. We twisted and turned everything that could possibly be made into a mourning hat. We dyed and dyed and dyed. We even cut up my own black evening hat, and fashioned it into something.

And the stream of customers was continuous.

'Madam, your hat will be ready for you to pick up on your way to the garden party.'

'Madam, I assure you it will be very becoming.'

'Madam, I will certainly not fail you.'

How we worked! I think I did not sleep for thirty-six hours. But the hats were ready in time, and the ladies were pleased. Decorum demanded a black hat, but it was nice to have a bit of flattery too.

To remind me of this, a queer coincidence occurred a long time afterwards. I was sitting over a cool drink in a Chelsea club talking to a friend about those days in India. A rather nice-looking lady came over to us . . . perhaps she was not very young but still she was very charming.

'Mr. Thaarup. Are you Mr. Thaarup?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'You once made me the prettiest hat. The prettiest hat I ever had. It was black and I bought it without seeing it first. I was buying a cat in a bag; or a hen in a bag. But it was the prettiest hat.'

Well, Delhi seemed a place where I could afford to grow a few roots. So I stayed. I had my two tailors, and I made some more hats. But Christmas was approaching and the local ladies evidently had their minds on other things. Or so it seemed to me, waiting.

And then I had one of my pieces of lunch-time good fortune. A telephone call came from Sir Victor Sassoon.

'Would you be open if I brought a few friends to buy some Christmas presents?'

The 'few' friends turned out to be about thirty strong. They came like a flutter of pretty butterflies, the gentlemen like a horde of locusts. When they left, nothing remained but a few necklaces and a bow tie or two. But my pocket-book was full and I blessed Sir Victor.

After that I began to make hats for all sorts of charming and important ladies: Lady Irwin, who in those days was Vicereine and who later became Lady Halifax, Lady Sykes, Lady Jackson.

Those were the days of race meetings, of lovely garden parties, of Government House receptions. It was the day when hats were made of superfine materials. I got a lot of experience. Most of all, I was able to meet people who, probably, I would never have met had I remained in London. To this day, many of the ladies for whom I made hats in India are still my customers. Only recently someone wrote to me after seeing me on television to remind me of 'the lovely cloche hat you made for me in 1931; in fine exotic straw with a beautiful emerald-green ribbon'.

I believe that a hat is a very personal thing to a woman, something she remembers far more easily and—if it is a nice one—with much more pleasure, than any frock or suit. Which is not really very surprising. After all, a hat

is something with which a woman can really express her feelings. It gives a woman a wonderful chance. She can be Cinderella at eleven o'clock in the morning and then for lunch everything that is charming and elegant. After all, the face is the first thing one looks at, and the hat is the nearest piece of apparel. With a twist here, and a line there, and something in the way of colour—one can do anything. Or almost anything.

I made enough to travel again. So back to Calcutta. Pavlova was giving a farewell performance on the night that I arrived. By good luck I was invited to a farewell dinner. Pavlova was not perhaps a very 'hatty' type, though I should love to have tried something for her, but I shall never forget her enchanting personality and the wonderful performance she gave that night.

I had persuaded the management to include in the programme a slip announcing my arrival. So for me it was not 'Goodbye' but 'Hullo'. Everyone was at the theatre that night, and the little announcement was wonderful publicity, and brought me lots of business.

By now I had almost perfected my technique as a travelling hat circus. In those days the Maharajas entertained a great deal. Society people came out from England. There was always something happening. If I heard that the Viceroy was going to Simla, or to Poona, or to Darjeeling, I knew that there I would find custom. What every pretty woman wanted for a party was a new hat. My hat bandwagon set forth at their call.

I had heard that Quetta was very beautiful and, as I wanted to see it, it seemed reasonable enough to combine pleasure with business. I took along my hats there, and I think it is probably the only time a consignment of hats has had a military escort. With pistols at the ready, we went grinding up the mountain passes almost to the North-West Frontier. I think it must have been equally rewarding to the officers' wives and myself at this outpost.

It was time I saw home again. I had repaid my debt; I had had a wonderfully interesting year. But now

I made my way down to Bombay, and from there to Colombo.

I was eager to leave, but at that time of year the demand for passages was great and I had to wait. From my little fisherman's cottage in the harbour I was rowed out every day to whatever ships were in port. I finally got a berth in a Japanese ship.

It was in Colombo that I met Govinda, a Buddhist priest, half-Italian, half-German, who was also on his way to Europe. In his bright orange robe with his bright orange umbrella, without any personal possessions, he still looked the gentleman he was. Like many before me, I was greatly moved by the faith of his brethren. Since we both had to wait for our ship, Govinda suggested that we should go up the hills to Kandy and spend the time at the Buddhist monastery. I shall always remember those tranquil and beautiful three days in the peace of the monastery.

Back to Ceylon and on to Egypt; then to Italy, where Govinda and I parted. My last view was of him waving the orange umbrella with all the dignity of an Eastern monarch.

It was springtime, and Rome looked an enchanted city, all pale terra-cotta and white. Partly because I had left myself so little money for the journey, and partly from sheer *joie de vivre* and a sort of try-anything-once attitude, I spent the night walking through Rome. I threw the customary coin in the *fontana*, which legend says ensures a return visit.

The train next morning overflowed with an amplitude of gentle nuns and monks. When lunch-time came they opened their baskets and with traditional courtesy offered me a share. Alas for good manners! I was hungry, and I accepted.

It was good to see Copenhagen again, but I had not finished with India. India in those days seemed to offer immense possibilities to me. So, very soon, I was back again; this time properly installed in a little shop in New Delhi. At that time New Delhi boasted only two European shops, Hamilton the jeweller and one of the ubiquitous general stores. It was on the first floor over the grocer

that I settled, and I felt wonderfully grand to have a 'pukka' establishment.

If photographs of the hats I was now making show them to be a little like lampshades, well . . . it was India and the fashion. A topee was not a very pretty idea for a fashionable woman, but a hat did have to provide some protection from the sun. Cloches were still the chic thing and there were some very pretty ones: the black and green hat with the sideways movement that a lady reminded me about so recently; a fisherboy's net cap with a deep 'shoosh' at the back. Just for luck, I used to cut a green felt four-leaved clover and sew it inside the hat.

I learned to make hats for all sorts of women. According to their personalities, the length of their skulls, and their pocket-books.

And I learnt something else; that the woman who is terribly confident that she knows 'just what suits her' generally knows least. Nowadays, when I get a customer like that, I simply say: 'Madam, here is my whole collection. I will have somebody show it to you.' There is a bit of a troll in me, of course; and though the customer may not know it, even if I am at the other end of the salon, I can tell whether she has chosen rightly or wrongly. And if the latter I am soon back again.

'Madam!' I say. 'Did you look at yourself from this side? Your forehead is too protruding for that one.' Or, 'That hat does not go with your nose. It is too . . .' I should like to add '. . . too much like mutton dressed as lamb', but of course one does not say such things.

But when a customer puts herself in my hands, then my interest in her is aroused. I am fascinated by any problem she may have, and will take endless trouble on her account. She can have a glass eye, two deaf-aids and three double chins; I can, and will, do something for her.

Quite recently a lady came to me on the recommendation of a friend of hers. She was a little nervous, but she did try to have faith in my ability to please her.

I put some hats on her, and they were all beautiful, and

the lady was quite satisfied to have any one of them. But I was not satisfied for there was something just missing.

The hat was for a wedding, and the wedding was at twelve o'clock the next day.

'I'll make something just right,' I said. 'You shall have it by eleven o'clock tomorrow.'

I have since found out that the lady passed a rather sleepless night. But next morning, just as I had promised, the hat was delivered to her exactly at eleven o'clock. And the hat was perfect.

Although my experiences in India were all useful training, and the friendships I made of inestimable value, somehow I never learned how to keep money. Quicker than I can say it, it disappeared as mysteriously as a fakir at the end of a thrown rope.

After I had been in Simla for some months I met a very enterprising American photographer, a man of great talent and enterprise. I loved hearing him talk about America and the enormous possibilities in that country. I was all for new fields to conquer, so in 1932 I made my way back to London, to meet this American and a friend of his who, I was promised, had a business proposition to make me.

The interview was in a hotel in Aldwych, and never did I push my way round a revolving door with higher hopes. Alas, the terms of the proposition were so strict—it meant including my soul in the bargain—that I refused.

And now I had no prospects. I was up against it again. But I was glad, glad to be back in London. Its hum and glitter enchanted me. Its immensity fascinated me. London was irresistible. This time I would stay. Somehow I would start up once more on my own. The first problem, to find premises! The elegant gentleman behind the desk in the mahogany-panelled estate office was courteousness itself. But all those desirable premises he so willingly suggested were beyond my means.

I knew the quarter where I must look: I knew the rent I could afford. The two things just did not seem to have any affinity. Until one day, one bright morning in early



spring, I was told of three tiny rooms to be let at No. 4 Berkeley Street, and at a rent which I could contemplate without awe.

I rushed to see them. And never will I forget my excitement. Already there were two hat shops in Berkeley Street: Madeleine Chaumier, who made beautiful hats, and another very famous shop called 'Gardenia'.

I walked past them, not envious or jealous, but simply thrilled to think that I, too, was perhaps going to find a niche amid such company. Opposite was Thos. Cook's; across the road, the Ritz. Surely this was an 'address'. However small the premises one's aspirations could be limitless in such surroundings.

It was a beautiful house. On the first floor, Dreyfus, the antique dealer; on the second, a photographer. A tiny lift took one quite plushily as far as that. Then you came to a doll's house staircase, uncarpeted, of course, leading to the third floor. A landing, a lavatory, and then my three little rooms.

My three little rooms! I knew they were for me the moment I saw them. Actually they were really nothing more than maids' rooms. The floorboards creaked, the landing was cluttered up with two large jugs marked 'fire', and a fire-escape ladder which I instantly christened Jacob's Ladder. As far as I was concerned the ladder led straight to Heaven.

And round in Berkeley Square, though it might still be a little early, the nightingales sang for me that night.

I signed the contract for three years. Thirty-five shillings a week for the first year, a few shillings more for the next two. I felt already that I was an adventurous tycoon.

The year 1932 saw the so-called Modern style of interior decoration at its height. It was the fashionable thing, and even the nicest houses, filled with really lovely old furniture, usually boasted one or two modern rooms. It meant steel tube furniture, American oilcloth and bright colours.

So, without much money to spare, I energetically set about decorating. I got some silver-grey American oilcloth and

pasted it on the walls. I painted the ceiling black. I got some black and white matting, and I got a few pieces of tubular furniture. I found an old writing-desk on which customers could write out their cheques, and this I polished black. Finally I put a little angel on the ladder.

I was ready. Almost.

I needed hats, and I needed someone to sew for me, because, though I could shape the hats, I could not sew finely enough.

I had heard that a place in the City was selling off oddments, so I hurried there and for thirty-eight shillings bought a whole assortment of hoods and millinery material.

I engaged a blue-eyed girl—naturally miscalled Hazel!

I can still see the hats I made. One, a little black postillion with a plume and a piece of Petersham ribbon, with tiny coloured safety-pins—from Woolworth's—which I put across the front.

Another hat, a tiny navy-blue thing, had ordinary steel pins stuck all round the edge to give a metallic glitter.

I did a little white felt pill-box with a swirl of red and white knitting wool round it—it has been done by other people since—and I put two knitting needles through the wool and called the hat 'Purl and Plain'.

I did panama straw banded like a target, and a little peaked schoolboy cap. I called it 'Eric, or Little by Little'.

With my last few shillings I bought two bottles of sherry and borrowed a few glasses. Then I sat down to write invitations to the Press.

I wrote to all the fashion editors. I wrote to *Vogue* and *Harper's*. I wrote to the daily newspapers. I remember that I had got the name of the fashion editor of the *Evening News*, Miss Vigers.

Miss Vigers came and several others. And years afterwards, I used to smile when they reminded me of those hats.

'You used such *interesting* material,' they would say.

The ladies who came to buy liked my hats and my little party. I sold a few, but not enough to make the party a

financial success. Then, just when I thought it was all over and I was clearing away the glasses, there was a rush up my tiny staircase, and in came a lady whom I had known in Bombay and to whom I had written but had received no answer.

How I loved that lady for her good nature! Her name was Amber, and when I first met her in Bombay she was having a flirtation with a charming young British peer. She had heard that I was in London and had come almost straight off the boat-train from the Riviera—and had brought with her two friends, both very smart and charming.

They all bought hats. They paid cash, and that saved the day. I went straight down afterwards and had a beautiful meal.

I thought, 'That's fine.' The Press had come and that was fine. Some customers had come, and that was better. But nobody followed.

It was tough. I had to keep the wolf from the door somehow. Once more I walked London with a paper bag of hats. First I went across to the couture houses. Victor Stiebel, Peter Russell and Norman Hartnell had just started up. And then Teddy Tinling, the great sports-dress expert. Later I was to make hats for many couture collections, Peter Russell's particularly, and it was always a great pleasure to work with him. But at this stage I was delighted to sell ones and twos of my hats. Victor Stiebel was kind and bought half a dozen straight off.

Then I trekked further. Up and down Baker Street to all those little 'madam' shops. To anybody who would pay thirty shillings or two guineas. As long as I could make enough money to eat and pay my rent, renew my stock and pay Hazel, that was enough.

A fashion sense had been simmering in me for some time. But now it was bubbling over. I was full of ideas, and longing to be able to go ahead a bit quicker.

There was a young man, Cecil Beaton, on the go at this time. I did not know him, but I admired his work. He was taking beautiful photographs of all the lovely women in London. I wrote to him.

'I am a young Dane and I am making some rather nice hats. You seem to know all the beautiful women in London. Could we two not meet?'

And then I went back to my itinerary.

But one day, I had occasion to telephone Berkeley Street from Baker Street, where I was peddling my wares, and I was told by a very excited Hazel that Mr. Cecil Beaton had left a message: would I please come out to his house (it was in Sussex Gardens in those days) and discuss things?

I hurried back, got together some hats and hastened off to Sussex Gardens to meet Cecil Beaton for the first time.

His mother was there, and his aunt, and his two sisters, and he introduced me and bought them a hat each. And he asked me to make a special one for his youngest sister, Barbara, for Ascot.

I thought of a large floppy green straw. For the first day I put a little apple twig with a green leaf on it; for the second day apple-blossom (all on a little safety-pin); for the third day a little apple; and for the last day just a little worm. It was the kind of nonsense that appealed to me just then.

Later, I got another telephone call from Beaton. He was going to photograph the famous Lily Damita, who was working in this country. Would I send along some hats? Of course I was thrilled, and I took a lot of care picking out what I thought would suit this star.

Next day I was told that everyone had been delighted. They were beautiful hats; they loved them.

I had almost forgotten the incident two months later when I opened *Vogue*, and there were two pages of pictures of Lily Damita. And the hats, my hats! 'By Aage Thaarup'.

It was wonderful.

## CHAPTER IV

LONDON was making fashion news. The new young names which, like stars at the onset of dusk, had at first glimmered only faintly, now began to flash more brilliantly.

Hartnell, Stiebel, Digby Morton, Peter Russell, Teddy Tinling, though still comparative youngsters, were beginning to create a bit of competition in the fashion firmament.

Molyneux thought it would be a good idea to cross the Channel and invade London. Schiaparelli followed suit. The London season, with its historic, crowded sequence of events began to have new fashion significance.

Virginia Pope, fashion reporter of the *New York Times*, wrote: 'London teems with gaiety; every bar, restaurant and theatre is packed with well-dressed people . . . style is in the air.'

To a young fashion designer it was all very stimulating. To know that one was a formative part of this was amazing.

I wanted to make a million hats! All different! All exciting!

I had my salon, bang in the right quarter. And it was a real 'premises'. On the third floor, it is true—but still it had a sort of 'atmosphere'. I actually had, too, the dignity of a brass plate. 'Aage Thaarup; Model Hats', it read. The odd thing is that, though it is now many years since I left those premises, the plate remains, tarnished—but a record!

Custom was improving. The fashion editors were writing nice notices about me. I was beginning to get a name as the young Dane with original ideas. 'Out of the ordinary,' they said. 'Amusing.' And then my first few clients helped. With that curious unpredictability of woman—which seemingly

inhibits her from disclosing, even to her best friend, the name of her dressmaker, but which allows her positively to *boast* about her milliner—they began to bring new faces to my salon.

Through such an introduction I was invited to a party given by the explorer Mrs. McGrath (formerly Rosita Forbes) at her lovely house in Great Cumberland Place. The party was strictly 'for women only', and I was to show hats and give a lecture. The party also inaugurated something new for those days, a cafeteria bar.

It is hard to believe now, when the A to Z of eating, from the preparation of the food right down to the grisly business of washing-up, is common knowledge, that in those days the self-help idea was unheard of in Mayfair. For a fashionable gathering first to queue, and then to carry its own lobster or chicken, was, if only they had used the word then, a new 'gimmick'. The magnificent setting, the opulence of the arrangements and the distinguished company belied any economy motive. It was just a new lark.

If the little gathering contained more than a smattering of names from Debrett, it did little to awe me. With the temerity of youth I faced my audience with the outrageous proposition that a woman's face could be made to fit the hat. It is a question of mood, I argued. The hat is the mood—gay or quiet, flamboyant, witty, challenging or demure. It is a question of the right hairdressing, the right collar, above all the right expression. If you feel in the mood of the hat, then the hat will suit you.

Looking back I marvel at my intrepid attack, though I still do believe that there is something in this argument. Particularly, I think that there is room for greater co-operation between hairdresser and milliner.

The Press were kind, and the audience, some of it anyway, came to buy hats from me. I remember particularly that one lady came with the request for a *provocative* hat. I wondered, but I never knew, did she aim to open some blind eye; stir some sleeping fire?

With new strength in my wings I began really to adventure. The cloche hat phase was finished, but it had left a legacy. Though I was now making all sorts of chic shapes, Bretons, sailors, turbans, pillboxes, they all had one thing in common. They sat deep on the head. And I wanted to break away from this.

It may sound simple. A new hat is surely what every woman loves. Might not one suppose that the more different the hat the better? If only as a challenge to a rival.

Years of designing hats has taught me that changing a fashion is not so simple. Put the average woman in front of a mirror with half a dozen really nice hats from last season and one quite new one, and almost certainly she will choose one of the old ones. Something similar to what she has worn before, the tried and trusted.

Happily, by now, I had on my books a quite imposing column of names. Names of ladies who could not only afford several hats at a time, but also could afford to experiment. They were ladies who could be seen lunching at the Ritz one day and the next day launching a ship or presenting a challenge cup. And certainly they would have a different hat each day for Ascot, one for Henley, and another for Goodwood.

Moreover, some of these ladies had almost as strong a feeling as I had for adventure in fashion. I think especially and with nostalgic pleasure of the hats I made that year for Thelma Lady Furness. Here was a woman whose distinguished charm allowed her to be bold in her choice of hats. It was for her that I made my first halo hat, completely off the face and as revolutionary as a tall black witch's hat would be today.

I recall another lady with a very strong fashion sense to whom I was introduced that year. Mrs. Ernest Simpson. She came to Berkeley Street, with a lady for whom I had only made one hat—but evidently a successful one.

I knew in a moment that Mrs. Simpson understood what a hat should do for her. She is as definite and individual a woman as I have met. Always so spick and span, with a

clean neat taste as distinctive as a hall-mark. In those days Molyneux and Mainbocher made her clothes: simple, good things. I enjoyed making hats for Mrs. Simpson right up to the dramatic crisis of 1937.

Mrs. Claude Beddington would, I know, have allowed me to speak of her as a 'character'. She came one day—on whose recommendation I do not know—sweeping into my tiny salon clothed ('disguised' would perhaps describe her state better) in a voluminous mackintosh cape. A cape was a rare thing in those days; this one, according to Mrs. Beddington, was the envy of all her friends.

Besides being a great personality, Mrs. Beddington was an astoundingly good-looking woman. Her skin was fair, all milk and roses, and she had quantities of dark, very dark hair.

'Young man, I hear you are talented and I want you to try to create for me. But I want nothing inspired by anything later than the fifteenth century.'

Bang. It was a command.

I cudgelled my brain. I searched the history books. I settled on a Viking inspiration.

The hat should be a tricorne, I decided, so I made it in grey silk with blue wings sticking out like oars from either side. The hat was not contemporary; it was not a 'pretty' hat, nor even picturesque. It was made with the finest workmanship, and I knew it was just what Mrs. Beddington wanted.

She swept into the salon, blue cape and all, and put on the hat.

'It's a masterpiece,' she said.

I got to know Mrs. Beddington better, and I copied that Viking hat perhaps a dozen times. But her husband was a great yachting man and there was always some exciting trip being planned, to Bermuda or Florida or some warm sea. So naturally I made yachting caps too—always, of course, with a 'difference'.

At home Mrs. Beddington was a great woman for parties. Something of a 'lionizer', she loved to collect people.



Men or women who had achieved something, young folk who she thought would one day do something big. To be summoned to one of these receptions was, of course, an honour. Always there was some surprise, as once when the lovely drawing-room, full of wonderful *objets d'art*, was decorated with hundreds of tulips. Just at dusk, when the curtains were drawn, a switch was pressed and each tulip came alight with a tiny electric bulb.

Later, when, alas, Mrs. Beddington had lost her husband, I was again asked to go to see her. She was staying at Claridge's, I think. 'I've lost everything! Everything!' she said. 'But I shall need some more hats.' What spirit that woman had!

Is there any place like a milliner's salon for meeting different types of women? I sometimes wonder, rather irreverently, whether a confessional box gets as varied a sample of femininity.

Another and quite different sort of customer at that time was the lovely Evelyn Lady Alington. Probably the oldest lady ever to climb my tiny staircase, she was rather of the period of Queen Alexandra. So gracious, so much a lady of the old school. She brought her maid; she bowed to the smallest liftboy or little nobody in the business.

She was beautiful; and she was very properly, as I think women should be, proud. She chose her hats with the greatest appreciation of what became her, and what was intrinsically good and beautiful.

And how kind she was. Surrounding her were always numbers of nieces and grandchildren. 'Eileen,' she would say, or 'Jennifer, go along and see that nice little Mr. Thaarup. I will pay.'

I made hats for this wonderful old lady for many years, right up to the middle of the war. Her charm was inestimable, her graciousness unbelievable. And when, alas, she died, there remained still one more gesture of kindness: her maid arrived one morning with two big boxes of feathers, ribbons and veils. Her ladyship had asked her to bring them to me, because she knew that I had difficulty in finding



*Former warkers in India boast 'Late hat-mokers to Aage Thaurup' when they set up an their awn in the lacial bazaar*

*London, 1935. The main warkroom in Grosvenar Street*





*From the show 'Ballet and Bonnets', 1936*

trimmings during the war. They were to be given to me with thanks for the nice work I had done for her.

It is sad to recall the passing of another outstanding woman. But how alive, how magnificently alive in those days was the incomparable Nellie Wallace!

I first saw her at the Palladium on that first visit of mine as a young boy. Surprisingly she was playing Juliet. Not a pretty Juliet, but, nevertheless, a very exciting one. But now she came to me for some hats to wear in her character sketches. I do not remember all the hats except that they were all deliciously exaggerated things. Extravagant ostrich feathers to wear with booties; a Robin Hood hat to go with a crinoline; and all sorts of other amusingly inappropriate pieces.

Then came the *famous* hat. The cockney hat that became her trade mark. A tiny, tiny brown hat with a big, big feather. The original, she told me, she had picked up in the market place at Nottingham where she first started performing on the public stage. And she had had it for 'donkey's years'. It had to be renewed.

'I'll try,' I said.

I got a bit of felt and a long pheasant feather; I copied that hat exactly. But Miss Wallace was too great an artist to let it go at that.

'It's got to have a worn look,' she said.

So we took it down the stairs, rolled it in the gutter, trod on it a little, sat on it—and got it just right.

I copied this hat several times more and always remembered to get the 'patina'. I also made several hats for Miss Wallace to wear in her private life, and most charmingly and *cleverly* she wore them too.

Then one day just before she was to appear at a Royal Performance I had a request to make another of the cockney hats. I made it in a great hurry, sent it off in time for her to wear that night on the stage. Next morning, standing on my landing, was a little hat box with a note from Miss Wallace.

'It hasn't quite got it this time.' I had not rolled it in the dust. It would not do.

It was only three days afterwards that I read that Nellie Wallace was dead.

Gloria Swanson and her husband, Michael Farmer, came to London about 1932. They took a tiny flat in Farm Street, only just round the corner from my place. Miss Swanson had seen one or two of my hats on a friend and admired them, so I was invited round to discuss hats for a film she was making.

What a wonderful personality she has; such disarming friendliness and spontaneous kindness. I immediately felt at home with her. Perhaps that is one of the most charming things about Americans.

As I came to know Miss Swanson better I realized that besides showing this native courtesy, she was a witty and amusing woman. Sometimes, thinking about today's 'stars', I realize that those old pioneers had a very great deal more than just a photogenic face.

Miss Swanson was apt to wear her hats a little too far off the face. With that rather long but lovely nose I could see this would not do, and remonstrated. She took my criticism gaily, with an appropriate jest.

In all I made her twenty-four hats on this occasion. The film was about a honeymoon; one scene was to be shot in Madrid, one in Rome, one in Budapest, and so on. And there was a different dress and hat for each occasion.

An extravagant honeymoon even for those days, but I could not have been better pleased. When I had finished the hats, Miss Swanson paid on the nail.

My list of customers was growing all the time. Sharing the score with the peerage were wives of successful business men and personalities from the stage and films. Some of these have since achieved fame, some merely notoriety, and some have sunk to oblivion.

But I think of the spartra and the canvas, the chiffon and the tulle I used to make these ladies' hats, shaping it and arranging it to give them each the flattery they wanted.

Was it flattery, though, that they all wanted? And how far did I succeed? Did the shape of a brim alter by the slightest

degree the shape of any of their lives? A hat is such a tiny object, only a transient thing, an extraneous affair: dare one claim such powers for it?

A hat is so personal; it can be as descriptive of character and mood as a diary. By its juxtaposition to the face, the eyes revealing the soul, the nose speaking of character, and the lips interpreting the senses, a hat has a key role to play. The bond between the hat and any one of the features can indicate an enormous amount. With wit and wisdom, with line and colour and texture, what cannot a hat do!

One lady, very well known, for whom I had now made several hats, had come to see me, her usual ebullient nature quite overcast by events concerning her husband. From hints it seemed that permanent estrangement was inevitable. So I was not surprised when she telephoned me.

'I'm going to the Law Courts. It is my divorce; I want a very smart hat. It must be black and it must be very becoming; but it must look very, very poor, because I want to be sure of alimony.'

I made the hat, a chic little thing, very plain but just right for her corn-coloured hair, her fair skin and long graceful neck. The lady won her case and 'phoned me immediately.

'Thanks, Mr. Thaarup. I won. Have the trimming ready. I'm lunching at the Berkeley and I'll drop in and pick it up.'

Another lady came to me, not so confident of what a hat could do for her. But she was an intelligent woman and enough of a sport to take on a little gamble.

She was, in fact, a school ma'am, quite young, quite good-looking, in a nice restrained suit, but a bit out of her depth buying an expensive hat. Naturally, because she had to have a lot of knowledge tucked away in it, her head was rather a big one.

She was applying for the job of headmistress in a big girls' school, and she had somehow heard that I liked making individual hats. Perhaps she had been reading one of the fashion magazines.

The lady placed herself in my care and I took great pains to make her a hat that did her justice, just the right balance of sense and sensibility, with that inestimable something that speaks of *savoir-faire*. Later I got a telegram: 'JOB SECURED STOP THANK YOU SINCERELY.'

This question of the large head is something that really exercises a milliner's powers, especially in Great Britain. In Scotland, for instance, skulls measure as much as two and a half inches bigger all round than those in the south; that is to say, a hat no bigger than a coconut and frightfully chic in London will have to be the size of a pumpkin to sell in Aberdeen. The Scottish skulls are not only bigger, but rounder too, and to adapt a hat is quite an art. If it is done cleverly it can be all right, but it is not as simple as the uninitiated might suppose.

A lady came to see me in Berkeley Street. She was Scottish and of noble birth, and she possessed one of these very large skulls. Hairdressing does, of course, from time to time make a difference in head measurements, but this lady's measurement was exceptionally large and her head was also very round.

She was a charming lady, full of good sense. Her voice was most attractive and her accent very charming.

Now when a lady is pleasant, service is always correspondingly pleasant. Naturally, if a customer leaves herself in my hands, I feel a duty to do my very best. On the other hand, if a customer comes to me and says, 'I know best,' then my enthusiasm is dashed, and I feel that someone else in the shop can serve her just as well.

But this lady left it to me, and although I had some difficulty I think I succeeded.

I like to think I have been as conscientious always, and certainly I have had some outstanding rewards. This was an instance when I was to receive one of the loveliest. Out of the blue it came, as unexpectedly as it was esteemed.

I had long nursed a secret ambition to make hats for five particular women. For three of these I had already gained that privilege. Greta Garbo, whose great beauty

entrances me, was one of the unattained. There remained one more whose pictures had so long interested and captured me.

The telephone rang. 'Can Mr. Thaarup be in at three o'clock to receive Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York?'

My kind Scottish lady had recommended me to the Duchess, now the Queen Mother. At last I was to have the chance I had dreamed about.

I put down the receiver, not quite in a panic, but not very calm. I simply thought I must make everything as nice as I possibly could.

I made my small salon ready, found a few extra nice hats. My stock was still not so very large; would the Duchess want a pink hat or a black hat, a felt or a straw?

Then, of course, there were the stairs. Everything was quite presentable, almost elegant up to the second floor, but after that there were bare boards. Quickly I borrowed a little strip of red carpet and secured it with drawing pins.

I tidied everything; went downstairs and stood in what I felt was a strategic position. I had never before received Royalty, but now I had done everything possible, and there was nothing to do but wait, as self-controlled as possible.

Mysteriously the news had already travelled across the street. A handful of girls and women were already waiting when Her Royal Highness stepped out of her car with her lady-in-waiting.

I showed the Duchess and her companion into the lift—so small I had to squeeze into it myself in order to close the gates, then pressed the button for the second floor.

'I'm sorry,' I said lamely. 'There's still a little further.'

Would the little bit of red carpet look decent? And above, the Jacob's Ladder, and my little room in grey? The black and white matting on the floor, the chromium chairs?

Nervously I drew aside the tweed curtain draped across my stock cupboard. A pink hat toppled out, and the Duchess smiled. The cold spell was broken.

Whenever I recall that first visit of Queen Elizabeth the



Queen Mother, I remember that smile; that amazing flow of warmth. The feeling of sensitivity and graciousness that immediately put another human being at ease.

Inevitably a special aura surrounds any Royal personage, but Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother has a special power of making those in her presence feel happy and at ease.

I showed a few berets and some other new hats. I explained about the Jacob's Ladder, I excused the fire jugs. I think I even admitted to Her Royal Highness the borrowing of the bit of red carpet.

Then came the Press, the photographers and the journalists. They descended upon me not in ones and twos, but in dozens. Stupidly I had not anticipated this. But something warned me; I must be discreet. The questions came like machine-gun fire.

'Where did the Duchess sit? Which hats did she like? How many did she choose?' I fenced as well as I could. But that was not easy.

But the photographers took pictures of some of my other hats and the journalists wrote some good stories.

When the hats were finished I went to No. 145 Piccadilly to fit them. Again I felt the spell of Her Royal Highness's unique personality. A thousand photographs speak of her charm and her lovely smile, but no photograph can tell the full story.

I could be excused for being a little elated, for it was a real step up to be making hats for a royal lady so close to King George and Queen Mary.

There was at that time no hint of the coming succession of King George's eldest son, Edward, nor of those other momentous events which finally led to the Abdication.

No dreams that these first hats of mine for the Duchess of York would lead to my making so many more for her as Queen of England. Hats that would accompany her on proud ceremonies in Kingdom and Empire in peacetime, or would play their part on heartening tours amongst her

people during wartime. And again, more hats for her as the still beautiful Queen Mother.

In those days my hats were for the Duchess of York, a charming young mother of Scottish royal lineage with two small and lovely children, the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, who sometimes would gravely watch the hat-fitting ceremony.

## CHAPTER V

**B**ICYCLING in Denmark; the shady cool roads and little wayside inns, and at the end of a long day—*Skaal!* The idea had been whispering to me for a long time.

My first really big season had been exciting, but tiring, too. Now I yearned to see my home, my family and my old friends. The links formed in childhood and adolescence are stubborn links.

The simple things of life beckoned, too. How glad I am that I have never outgrown a liking for these. Not perhaps a recipe for success but, counting one's blessings on the fingers, a simple taste is one that I would surely include on the first hand.

Inevitably I have something of the peacock in me. No fashion creator could succeed without it. As a proud bird displays its plumage, I love to stage-manage a display of colourful hats.

Some of the shows I have organized have stretched every inch of my ability in conjuring up original and arresting ways of presentation. This feeling for 'theatre' drags like a magnet when circumstances provide the opportunity. Between times I can, and do, relax. Maybe a bit of Yoga I picked up in India. Even three square yards of back-garden and one beautiful tree can transport me from it all.

And the humble things of life. I love to sit in the 'gods' of a theatre with whatever company I find there. I adore the unexpurgated joys of a village fair. Small houses are practically an obsession.

Although I have enjoyed all the de luxe ways of travelling, I can still enjoy the *mélange* of a third-class compartment.

A bus ride remains for me the unexampled method of transportation, plus observation, not merely of streets and architecture, but of the sluggish and the scampering, the troubled and the carefree, the young and the old.

Most of all, I can still relish the simple meal. One of the first things I do when I return to Denmark is to order the humblest of dishes. A thick yellow soup, made from dried peas, probably peasant in origin, the sort of dish that every working-class household would have on Sundays. To me it is as good as any turtle soup.

If my upbringing left me with some proletarian tastes, they are no bad thing to have in the ups and downs of life. And though my father upbraided himself for not having gained enough material success to allow him to give his sons opportunities, equally he would have hated any growth of pretentiousness in us.

I had my little holiday at home, filled my lungs with fresh air and my mind with endless pictures of wide skies, grey bridges, fishing boats and all the mysterious fauna of river and sea-shore. With renewed enthusiasm I returned to Berkeley Street and dived straight away, like a submarine, into the enveloping waves of my business.

By the middle 1930's, with my little shop in Berkeley Street doing so well that I could take an extra room on the second floor, relegating the third floor to workrooms only, I was able to invite my mother to London for her first visit.

I had told her a great deal about the fascinating rush and roar of London; its majesty and its immensity. How surprised she must have been, nevertheless. And, as I now recognize, probably her greatest pleasure was in seeing for herself some of her son's small success.

Of course I made my mother several hats. They were not the first I had made for her, nor were they the last. But I did on this occasion make one hat which greatly pleased her. This hat was destined for more than one transitory pleasure. In subsequent years she would sometimes ask me to copy 'the hat that suited me so well'. Then, as time went on, and her taste became more static, she would

simply write, 'Make it in black velvet,' 'Can you do it in straw?'

Finally, it became simply 'rr'. 'I shall need a new hat for S——'s wedding. Will you bring rr with you?'

I could afford now a small delivery van. I chose a tiny black thing and engaged a young, red-haired Scots lad to drive it. In those days there was a vogue for spelling one's name in lower case. I pondered whether I should do this, but a bigger problem still was whether or not to change my name entirely.

Nobody could pronounce Aage Thaarup. Nobody could remember how to spell such a name. Would it not be better to adopt something easier? Of course I received plenty of advice and a great many suggestions, but in the end I decided to keep my name and to chance the consequences. Such is the curiosity of mankind that in British eyes my name acted not as a deterrent but as something of an advertisement.

'I saw a little van stopping at the traffic lights with the most *extraordinary* name. It had four "A"s. I can't think what nationality it is.'

The lady would puzzle over it and possibly discuss it with her husband and in that way my name became quite familiar in London.

The magazines were beginning to notice me. Lunching one day at a fashionable restaurant a very chic figure passing my table hallo-ed me.

'What are you doing for spring, Mr. Thaarup?'

It was Mrs. Rodney, a most fashion-wise woman and at that time editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Off my guard for the moment, and half in joke, I said something about 'vegetables'.

'That sounds interesting! I'll send someone along tomorrow.'

'Someone' would mean a fashion reporter with a pencil and notebook and possibly a photographer. So I was in a quandary. I had only said 'vegetables' in fun. I decided the best thing I could do was to substantiate my remark.

Next morning I quickly made a little white basket straw hat, went out and bought some fresh peas, some little potatoes and new carrots. By the time the reporter arrived, and she *did* have a photographer with her, I had my vegetable-trimmed hat ready. Two months later, there it was in *Harper's Bazaar* . . . designed by Aage Thaarup . . . the Covent Garden motif—in carrots, cauliflowers and some very becoming spinach!

But, in the meantime, I had to do something about a hat on these lines, one with more durable qualities. Whenever I have been in this sort of predicament I have always had the good luck to know someone who could help me. Perhaps it is because of my genuine interest in all sorts of people. Somewhere in my mind I store impressions and facts about them. At the appropriate moment their name springs out. And at this moment I thought of Victor L——.

Dear, crazy Victor L——. I first met him in London, but knew him better when he again lived in Paris. Victor was the son of a well-to-do tradesman in Paris. His father used to have a wonderful and lovely old shop, the sort of shop where you could purchase superfine notepaper, elegant quills, wax and the most felicitous of writing equipment. But business had become bad at the time when Victor took over. He was an artist by nature, a lean, long figure in stature, and not over-robust. This decline in business enveloped him in despair. Under one of these clouds, poor Victor one day threw himself into the Seine.

A timely rescue, however, led to a complete change in his life. His rescuer had a very charming daughter, a plump, sensible girl. She nursed Victor back to health and the miracle that so often happens between patient and nurse happened once again; they fell in love. I always knew this charming lady as Mrs. L——. True, their life was distinctly Bohemian, but it was only after I had known them for fifteen years, and they announced quite mildly that they were going to get married, that I discovered just how Bohemian.

But that is beside the point. Victor, I knew, was the man

to help me. He had been dabbling in plastics, and in those days that was quite new. I flew to Paris and together we worked out how to make some plastic vegetables.

The little green peas in their pods were highly successful, so were the tomatoes. Thus I started something that added a bit more to the legend of that 'Mad Hatter', Aage Thaarup. I remember I made one hat trimmed with these vegetables for the Duchess of York. It happened that when I took it to No. 145 Piccadilly the Duke of York (later King George VI) was present at the fitting. The hat amused the Duke immensely and he often joked about it afterwards, asking me what I would be doing next.

Hats were a great deal more varied at that time than they had been for years. No two women needed to look the same. There were Breton sailors, rather clumsy ones we should think them now but becoming to certain faces. There were tricorues, and the Glengarry shape was just coming along. There were bonnet-shaped felts and straws, and the halo hat, a real reversal of fashion, had definitely arrived.

Cartwheels were 'in' for certain occasions. It was the beginning of a period when beach wear, foreshadowing the modern playsuits, was taking on a new fashion status, and the good-looking straw cartwheel was part of it. Long frocks were still being worn at Ascot and at garden parties. I loved making those big waving brims which complemented them. When trimmed with ostrich plumes, or swathed with tartan ribbon, or dotted with huge marguerites you had the million-dollar look.

The showrooms at No. 4 Berkeley Street, although I had taken on part of the second floor, were still too small. I now had several girls stitching away at hats on the third floor, and one or two sales-girls downstairs. I looked around and decided that I should have to make another move. This time it was to be quite unassailably 'correct' in position and character. Grosvenor Street was my target.

But Grosvenor Street was not only highly expensive but impossible to gate-crash. Molyneux had his house there,

but most of the property was in the Duke of Westminster's estate and trade was frowned upon.

I did finally get there, however, right opposite Molyneux. The rent, rather frighteningly, was £500 a year, nearly three times what I was paying in Berkeley Street. And there was a lot of decorating to do. The rooms were big and I should have to carpet them; there would be curtains, there would be florists' bills; electricity and telephone, more staff and more wages. But I was determined to go ahead. I was making thousands of hats. And now I would make thousands more. All would be well.

A party to open my new showrooms was, of course, essential. But before that I had to think out a scheme of decoration. I chose a white and grey décor; the walls and paint white, the carpet grey. The curtains were of yellow tweed and in the centre of my big room was a vast pouffe buttoned in Victorian style.

I moved into Grosvenor Street just the day before my opening party. I had had a mad week, dashing between the two premises, keeping one eye on the Berkeley Street workrooms, and the other on the workmen in Grosvenor Street. There had been plenty of hard work, plenty of long hours, but here at last I was in Grosvenor Street. I sat on the vast sunshine-yellow pouffe, the candelabra gleamed on the sunshine-yellow curtains. It could have been real sunshine, shining for me.

I believe in giving parties even if they are only hat parties. My opening party I resolved should be good. Everyone should enjoy themselves, including the hats!

I had written to the magazines and newspapers, but since my rooms were now so much larger I thought it would be interesting to mix people up a bit. Customers, friends, Press and all.

It was early spring and I had ordered dozens of yellow and mauve crocuses for the windows. For the sandwiches and drinks I had a little bar put up in one corner of the big room, and then came the question—Who was to serve all these people? For a moment I was stumped. Then out of my



mind sprang a name—Quaglino. And what a name! Or, rather, what a person! The prince of restaurateurs. Dare I ask him?

But it is nearly always the same: the bigger the man, generally the kinder. We had met on an earlier hat show, one that I had staged in his restaurant, and now with charming grace he agreed to my suggestion. Even if it was only a sandwich for Quaglino, it was certainly a feather in my cap.

Like every host, I had sent out invitations to rather more people than space permitted, on the supposition that if three are asked only two come.

But this time they all came. Stage jostled with Society. Press handed drinks to customers, and vice versa. So tightly packed were we I feared for some of the less robust. Fay Wray (mercifully without her orang-outang) and the slim porcelain figure of Anna May Wong both took refuge with Quaglino behind the bar.

The ice clinked, the cigarette smoke hazed a blue ceiling to the room, and that curious babble which comes from a party enjoying itself swelled, then stopped dead as there came a demand: Hats! Hats!

I had secretly hidden a hat beneath the counter. 'Would you please lift me up?' I said to a couple of tall young men.

'Ladies,' I said. 'It was going to be a hat show, but as you see there is no space to show you more than one.' Out of my jacket I pulled the hat. And in the next morning's paper, one fashion reporter wrote: 'We enjoyed Mr. Thaarup's hat party last night. *It was a charming hat.*'

Shortly after I moved into my yellow and grey and white showrooms, a very vivacious personality came to see me, a lady for whom it was always a very great pleasure to make hats. Lady Oxford. Those patrician features were a challenge, something for a milliner to try to live up to. Meeting Lady Oxford for the first time could only be exciting. The merest 'Good morning' coming from her seemed to have more than ordinary significance. Knowing her better, one could always be sure that she would issue some challenging

thought which, even when you had parted from her, would follow you through the day.

You could never tell what you were in for with Lady Oxford. One could generally expect some forward-looking idea; equally it could be something startlingly practical with an almost Victorian flavour. Coming down from the workrooms one day, I found Lady Oxford being shown some hats by a young sales-girl. It was a cold day and the sales-girl had a rather short frock and, of course, nylon stockings—or were they silk in those days? Lady Oxford always wore ground-length dresses, and as I came in I heard her say: 'You silly girl! You'll catch your death of cold. Now you be sensible, as I am.'

And she lifted her skirt and showed black and white striped football stockings reaching to the knee. The odd thing is that they looked right!

Every new face that comes into my showroom poses a problem. It might be only the pleasantest kind of a problem, like how to make a hat as beautiful as the face. But even pleasant problems are still problems. There are always several factors to consider. Height and deportment are two characteristics, for instance, which many women seem not to think at all relevant in the choice of a hat. Yet a good hat on a woman with the wrong habits of pose can look silly. Whereas even a silly hat, worn in the right way from the heels upwards, can look wonderful.

Lady Wilkins was one lady who came to see me with a lovely problem, the problem of a mass of copper hair. I say problem because it is always hard to defy accepted hoodoos and whenever I meet a woman with any shade of red hair I fear that before I even start to think of colour I shall be told that of course pink is out of the question.

But in considering the colour of a hat, hair is not something that one caters for separately. It is the *combination* of hair and complexion that must be considered. *A plus B*, or *A plus X, Y, Z!* It is never the same for two ladies, even though they both have copper hair.

I made some lovely hats for Lady Wilkins, and I did use pink, but as a subsidiary motif.

White hair presents another problem but one that I enjoy solving. Here, more than with any other colour hair, the pigment of the skin differs. But with a bit of underlining and a bit of top colour, the use of some rare hue, what magic one can make! Tricornes, little postillion hats, what I call 'side-saddle' hats. There is a world of romantic dignity in them. And often they suit the white-haired, but still youngish and gallant woman very well indeed.

At about that time I took a combined holiday-cum-business trip to the Continent. London was making such fashion news that more than one designer had been encouraged to cross the Channel with a collection to show in Paris. Digby Morton had been over and so had Norman Hartnell and Victor Stiebel. The idea was to catch some of the American dollars before they melted in the Paris air. I, too, would make the pilgrimage—with my hats.

But I planned at the same time a brief motoring holiday and it is perhaps that part of this trip which sticks in my mind most. I was to go with an old friend from Copenhagen, rather specially to try out a magnificent second-hand bargain of a car which he boasted just then. Our trip was planned for February, not perhaps the best month for motoring, but the bargain had to be put through its paces without delay. Moreover, February was the month when I could hope to catch the buyers in Paris since they were bound to be there at that time for the spring openings.

We set off from Copenhagen with a tight schedule, motoring through Germany and down along the Rhine. It would be rather good fun, we decided, to spend a night in Cologne, where the annual Carnival would be in full swing.

My recollection of the Carnival is a bit hazy, dominated mainly by the cheerful crowds. The whole of Cologne seemed to be in the streets that day or else in the restaurants and *bierkeller*. Young and old, in twos or in half-dozens, they drifted about determinedly aimless. They sang wherever they were, uninhibitedly and boisterously, but always

tunefully, and as the day thickened into a rather black night they danced.

I remember, too, the long procession, by no means as grand as the Lord Mayor's Show but on similar lines. Gigantic figures and heads peered over the edges of wagons, set-pieces had the local belles throwing streamers and kisses overboard. Some of the propaganda made no impact on me but one wagon did stick in my memory, a wagon full of grotesquely gesturing, black-garbed men. The masks of Hebraic cast left no doubt for whom the mockery was intended.

We drank the Rhine wine and consumed outsize meals; bought some souvenirs at one of the few shops open and the next day started off again. It was Sunday, and so far our twenty-five horses had borne us very comfortably. We passed Coblenz on our way down to Alsace-Lorraine, then, just as we breasted a bridge, an ominous bumping warned us of a punctured tyre. I got out of the car and went ahead to investigate the possibilities of help. Blank shops and an absence of life in the street did not promise much. An obliging *Hausfrau* at her kitchen door directed me to a back-street garage where I might find someone, and where I did indeed run to earth a most capable young man. With great goodwill and skill, he whipped off the tyre, put on the spare and mended the puncture. We were lucky, he pointed out, to find him at home. Everybody else was at the Nazi meeting that day, and in another few minutes he would have been there himself.

The job done, the spare wheel strapped on the back and our bill paid—it was a modest one—we prepared to push on. As a last good-natured gesture our mechanic plastered a swastika sticker on to the windscreen of our car. The whole place was plastered with them so the one on our windscreen did not seem to matter. We lingered a bit that day, but arrived at the Alsace-Lorraine border the next. And what a to-do! There is no official more officious than the Customs, in all countries. We had nothing to declare—my hats had been sent direct to Paris—but how

that man harassed us. Every possible rule was brought into play. But it was only after we had moved on that we found how really unpopular we had been. Our spare-wheel tyre was stabbed and slit to a state of uselessness. It was the swastika that had angered. Understandably.

We got to Paris in the end; but our journey had made us think! Not very seriously, perhaps, and for not very long, because we were both soon absorbed in our work. I had booked a room in the Hotel Scribe, afterwards famous as the headquarters of the Press during the war. The show went off quite nicely; I did not do a lot of trade, but I certainly did meet a lot of the American buyers. We exchanged cards and later some of the buyers came to see me in London. One buyer, representing the big American house of Lord & Taylor, was very enthusiastic, and with his help I was able to stage a show for his store. A show that 'started something', as they say.

Bit by bit, in my own little way, I had been building up a reputation for originality, particularly in the staging of my hat shows.

On one of the earliest, called 'Magic Lantern and Magic Hats', I had employed an artist to forecast in silhouette the dress fashions for the coming season; a bustle on one, a new shoulder on another. These were shown on the magic lantern slides whilst some pretty girls paraded the hats which I had designed to go with each forecast. I shall be letting out no secret now if I admit that I had sound tips from my couturier friends as to what was likely to happen.

Another time I did a show with the aid of a very 'piquant' prop: a genuine Punch and Judy box which was used to frame the hats as one by one they were popped up by a very small assistant hidden in the box. At the 'Mirabelle', I employed a tree from which, as I compèred the show, I plucked the trimmings for each hat.

For a long time—since my days in Paris—I had known Salvador Dali. Not only did I like the man but I felt a sincere admiration for his work. I enjoyed the oblique approach

to things, and felt I understood some of the pent-up emotion that is released in his work.

So far I had only ventured timidly with the surrealist idea, but now with Salvador Dali's exhibitions making world-wide news, and the American invitation in mind, I thought the time appropriate for a little fun with the hats. Surrealist fun! So back to my old friend Victor. Together we concocted all sorts of charming bits of 'hatty' nonsense, eyes with musical notes coming out of them, a sensual red mouth, a bit of palm, a snail and a bird.

I must say that I admire the Americans for the way in which, facing something new, they 'take it on the chin'. The window was boldly dressed out with these astonishing hats, and advertising space taken in a great many newspapers. With characteristic persuasiveness the captions under each picture dispelled any nervousness the American buyer might have felt.

'Sounds insane, but looks fascinating . . . its meaning mysterious, its gaiety obvious.'

And at the top of the half-page 'ad.', huge headlines: 'MAD, MAD SURREALIST HATS FROM LONDON. HEAD-TURNING, EYE-CATCHING MILLINERY BY THE YOUNG DANE WHO SNATCHES SURREALIST TREND OUT OF THE PARIS AIR. THE PET DESIGNER OF LONDON'S BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS.'

Giving hat shows fascinated me. I liked gathering around me artists and painters, anyone who could contribute something creative—and welding their work into an artistic whole. For one show, I reached out even to the ballet, with a prima ballerina and all.

Perhaps, after all, I should have been an impresario.

In the middle of the 1930's Alison Settle, now fashion editor of the *London Observer* and erstwhile editor of *Vogue*, started a new campaign, not the first or the last for which this sagacious lady has agitated and fought on behalf of fashion. Her idea was that the top British fashion designers should unite and form a Group. The object of the Group was that they should not only give group shows, but could co-ordinate their individual seasonal showings

and now and then concertedly steal a march on Paris instead of always humbly following in that jade's wake.

The Group was formed and named 'The Fashion Group of Great Britain'. Alison, I think, was President. What a fine piece of work that was!

The first of the shows I gave for the Group was the Punch and Judy show, and this was held at Claridge's. I subsequently gave many shows at the Curzon Cinema and got to know this little place inside out. But one particular show I arranged for the Group had a quite different setting, the Café de Paris. It was a composite showing of dresses, lingerie, cosmetics, jewellery, hosiery—and hats.

There were a lot of people interested in the Group, and somehow I had persuaded them all that it would sound a fresh note if this Café de Paris show were given without any mannequins. Partly, I think, because the surrealist fever was still with me. Chief amongst the almost amateur band of conspirators in this venture were John Fowler, Inger Sonsthagen, Winifred Pepler from *Vogue*, a carpenter and myself. The Group subscribed a sum of money, and gave me *carte blanche*.

Some kind enthusiast lent us a big basement in Grosvenor Street, and down below we repaired to hatch out our plans and hammer out the exhibits. At this time there was a lot of 'period' influence, particularly Edwardian, and this just suited our ideas.

From Digby Morton we got a headless dummy, one half of which he clothed beautifully in Edwardian clothes, the other in his latest creation. Underwear we showed suspended from a line strung between two poles and brought on to the floor by four little boys in leopard skins. Stockinged legs and long gloves stuck out of a huge, white-painted, foaming wash-tub. Chains of mussels and oyster shells spilled over; and seagulls perched on top, each with a hat in its beak.

Harrods made a six-foot iced cake, one side blue sugar, the other pink, which we decorated with period jewellery from Ogden and Cartier.

Everything that night was done with this half-and-half motif. Even the sandwiches, half-shrimp, half-watercress. But the *pièce de résistance* was the 'doll'. The audience were mainly buyers from the big stores in London and the Provinces, with just a few from abroad. We had had some financial support from the textile firms and they had asked us to launch a new colour.

The 'doll', sitting in the middle of a huge platter, was wheeled on to the floor scintillating with a hundred thousand pounds' worth of aquamarines on her Worth frock. Simultaneously a telegraph-boy came hurrying up with a wire which James Laver, who was compèring the show, read to the audience. The message asked them to choose between Horizontal Blue and Faraway Blue, the two colours shown.

When the voting cards had been collected, James Laver turned to the 'doll', which all this time had been motionless, and asked 'her' opinion. And the 'doll', really a mannequin, lifted her skirt to disclose one light and one dark blue leg and detached the 'leg' of the winning colour, handing it to James Laver.

It was fun doing that show. James Laver, writing in the *Sunday Chronicle*, to which at that time he contributed a weekly article, said of me: 'Next time, Thaarup would like to take Trafalgar Square for a show. He would like to build a tent from the top of Nelson's Column. And if you think that is a bit wild, talk to him and before you know where you are you will be helping him choose the ribbons for Landseer's lions.'

One of the biggest thrills around that time was when I was asked to do a show in Copenhagen. The firm was the famous '*Magasin du Nord*' and I really did feel complimented by their giving me a quite free hand.

The idea was that the windows should be dressed and not unveiled until ten-thirty in the evening, at the moment when the theatre crowds were coming out. I was given the help of two bright young salesmen, and together we ransacked the basement and stock rooms, where we found all sorts of queer items. A broken breast from a dummy, the



buttocks of another. A canary, some fishing-rods, and so on. That window surely looked very surrealistic by the time we had finished it!

But for me the charming thing was the sequel. I had telephoned my family and asked how they liked the window. The verdict was quite simply 'AWFUL'. Oh dear! I wondered how the store liked it! I had booked my seat in a 'plane going back to London next day and just as I was about to go aboard I was presented with a long box, the sort that usually contains long-stemmed roses. In my box reposed a slender white arm, in the hand one red and one white carnation—and my cheque!

What a gesture! What a riposte!

The charming joke was not quite over. When I arrived at Croydon a stern official demanded, 'Anything to declare?' And with that mobility that an inanimate object sometimes mischievously exhibits, out fell the plaster 'arm', transfixing everybody's gaze.

'So sorry,' I said. 'Just a lady's arm.'

The day's excitement was still not finished, for that night I stayed in Winchester at the delightful old-world hostel 'The God Begot'. Starched maids, four-poster beds, white linen—and ghosts. The setting was quite perfect for the inquisitive, black-stockinged, becaped maid who peeped into the presentation box, and screamed.

And screamed.

## CHAPTER VI

**I**F dreams could all come true!

One of my first dreams, as soon as I began really to be interested in hats, was that I would one day make hats for Greta Garbo.

I have made hats for a score of Hollywood's loveliest women: a score of my dreams have come true. Alas, this special dream, this dream of making hats for Garbo, remains still in the shadows of unreality. But dreaming dreams . . . is that such a bad thing?

I was fourteen years old when I saw Garbo in her first Swedish film. Not too young to react intensely to the almost mystical beauty of her features. Not too old to dream extravagantly. I left the dark of the cinema with the brightest vision for ever engraved on my mind.

It is common to speak of Garbo nowadays as a legend. In 1955 one sensible cinema management revived *Camille*, thus giving a young generation an opportunity to judge Garbo for themselves. For me, Garbo is no legend. She is still the most beautiful woman in the world.

And I shall still continue to dream dreams. Dreams of big picture hats to sweep away from that wide brow; tiny fringes of ostrich plumes peeping over as provocative as those long-fringed eyelashes. I shall dream of little coquettish Empress Eugénie hats; of deep tricorne hats to match a mood of *hauteur*. And even of down-to-earth cloches in sympathy with lighter moments. But it seems there is just one hat that Garbo likes; a felt slouch hat. And somehow even that becomes her.

So I never made hats for Garbo, and I cannot say whether she would be hard to please, or easy. There is a popular

idea that all film stars are temperamental, but remembering all the film stars for whom I have had the pleasure of making hats I can recall very few for whom this description would be suitable. And none of them had tantrums!

A remarkable ability to concentrate on the hat in hand, so to speak, and a devotion to its details seem to me to represent the trait much more frequently found; which, of course, leads one inevitably towards that old axiom about genius and its being an infinite capacity for taking pains. Whether this old adage holds water or not, certainly lots of those charming stars have plenty of this capacity. Nor is it confined to ladies.

In 1932 Victor Stiebel, who was a great friend of Elsa Lanchester and her husband Charles Laughton, suggested to Laughton, who was about to make a film based on the life of Rembrandt, that he should come to me for some period hats. This was a great compliment and I was thrilled.

Anyone who has seen Laughton on the stage or in films will know with what gusto he attacks his parts. And with no less enthusiasm did he enter into the quite arduous business of getting those hats right. Laughton lived at that time in one of the squares bordering on Bloomsbury. How right that quarter was for this rumbustious character!

I went to see him there, in fact I spent many hours discussing things, sometimes just watching him and sometimes trying on shapes. We looked through volumes of pictures, we sorted and we experimented. There was to be a great number of close-up shots and it was important that these hats should be absolutely correct. There was one for the Dejected Man; another for the Confident Man; and another for the Old Man, and so on. Mr. Laughton was a real stickler for detail, but no man ever gave me best at that so we got them right in the end and he was as pleased as I was.

It was a wonderful film, a beautiful film. Alas, it was not a great commercial success, though it ranked, I believe, as a *succès d'estime*.

It had taken some little time making these hats and when I had finished I was steeped in the period. It followed as

naturally as the night the day, that I should launch some Rembrandt hats. With an almost wholesale order for deep red velvet, I embarked on a series of berets and turbans, giving them fifteenth-century spice and aromatic names. Result, the chic thing that season was a Rembrandt hat.

Marlene Dietrich is a star who, when she is working on a film, shows a singlemindedness which matches even that of Charles Laughton. It was Constance Collier who introduced us. 'Come down to Denham Studios,' she said. 'You two will get on like a house on fire.'

It was the same in those days as it is now. A lot of door-men to get past, a dresser to find, and still one was not at all sure of finding the 'star'. This star was certainly not in her dressing-room and not on the set. And the two things were literally miles apart. But we had to try to find her. I tramped, and Constance Collier tramped at my side.

The film was called *Knight Without Armour*, with Robert Donat playing opposite Marlene. The shots that morning were of a Russian scene and were staged half in the open. Appropriately enough it was a wretchedly cold, raw morning. We stamped our feet, and shuffled on.

Wandering out into the biting air I spotted a chair with 'DIETRICH' written large across the back. There she was, the famous, the glamorous Dietrich, a scarf round her head and straw slippers on her feet, sipping tea from a saucer; frozen to the bone, but purposefully absorbing the discomfort of the cold and really living her part in the film.

It was not my first meeting with this famous personality. As far back as those early days in Berlin we had rubbed shoulders at a party. But seeing Dietrich for the first time, the second or the hundredth time is to fall under her spell. It is as though the air were suddenly electrified.

Miss Dietrich is wonderfully chic in her dress. She has that inestimable fashion attribute, the ability always to look soignée. Those cheekbones, the wide eyebrows and the delicate colouring are a milliner's delight. Add to this a quite uninhibited approach to the idea of something new in hats and she has everything a milliner loves.

So Miss Dietrich came to my showrooms in Grosvenor Street. Here was a poser. How was I to match her mysterious glamour? I got the idea of a bedouin's headdress, and adapted it in amber and black tulle with a beaded band in bronze to keep it in place. Another hat I made with a pixie crown and a square peak in front; on the front I put a miniature replica of Buddha's hands. And I made a mink hat. Did I say *a* mink hat? No, two mink hats. That was Miss Dietrich.

Whilst fitting Miss Dietrich at her flat we talked of the old days and the old UFA films in Berlin. And although she could speak English very well, she liked then to use her mother tongue, so we fell into German. She was completely natural. She wore no make-up and was literally almost translucent—translucent, with a look of luminous alabaster that I have never seen on anyone else.

When I think of film elegance, I recall those early days in Berkeley Street, and the first film star for whom I made hats, Anna May Wong. No star could eclipse her for sheer elegance. She loved to dress in European clothes and she had some of the loveliest furs I ever saw. Recalling that slim, graceful figure and the striking way in which she wore her clothes, reminds me that today one of the most famous models for Christian Dior has just that same slender, oriental beauty.

Naturally I made coolie hats for Anna May Wong. The Chinese Exhibition was in London at the time and a little later Anna May Wong appeared in a film of *Chu Chin Chow*. Overnight almost, coolie hats became quite the rage. Some of the hats I made from old bits of Chinese embroidery; one I made in black felt with a Chinese translation of 'Good Luck' embroidered on a petersham ribbon.

Miss Wong came to see me one day and asked to have 'Bon Voyage' embroidered on her hat. Her father, who owned a thriving laundry business in Hollywood, had died, so she was bidding me good-bye. I heard afterwards that this charming woman, this very fine artist, proved also to be very capable in business.

Were coolie hats ever worn in Europe before those first coolie hats that I made for Anna May Wong? I am not sure but I do not think so. Today, coolie hats are once again in fashion.

Elizabeth Bergner was another star whom I first met in Berlin. I saw her from my favourite seat in the 'gods' and was spellbound from the moment she made her entrance.

And what an entrance. The piece was called *Kreidekreis* ('The Chalk Circle'). No curtain adorned the stage, there was simply a staircase leading from the orchestra pit to the wings on one side. In the centre was an enormous paper circle and, through this, as boldly as a little circus horse, jumped the tiny figure of Elizabeth. What magnetism there was in that small figure. She held the stage from the moment she appeared.

My first meeting with Miss Bergner was at a party given, I think, by Max Reinhardt in Berlin. Success was already hers, lifting her a little apart at that party. I was still nothing more than an apprentice and surely the least conspicuous of the crowd. Only, perhaps, the dreaming eyes of youth to distinguish me.

Would Miss Bergner remember me, I asked myself when, soon after I had made the hats for the Rembrandt film, Laughton suggested that we should meet? From afar I had been watching Miss Bergner's flight from success to success. I had seen her in *Escape Me Never*. I had three times watched her unforgettable performance in Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Now she was to play in her first British film, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. And Laughton thought I was the man to make the hats for her.

She was now Mrs. Czinner and living at Highgate. The appointment to see her made, I jumped on a bus, my mind full of pleasurable anticipation. *Die Bergner*, the one and only Bergner, my earliest love of the theatre; I was to meet her again.

I found the house, one of those rather splendid old houses of the Victorian period none the worse for a dash of Italian style about it. With my thoughts casting back to that little

figure and the paper circle, to Berlin and the *bierkeller* parties, the appearance of a very proper English butler was a shock.

A little dashed I came into the hall. It was very quiet; the carved oak shone mutely, the card tray winked silently. I felt very lonely. Suddenly down that wide staircase came an elfin figure in slacks, a scarf round her neck and a pencil in her hand.

'*Entschuldigen Sie mich bitte, ich habe eben meine englische Stunde gehabt.*—You must excuse me, I've just had my English lesson.'

My heart sang; it was the same Bergner, as entrancing as ever.

I made a jaunty felt pixie-ish hat in forest green. I made a comely high-pointed wimple in white and silver lamé, the drapery descending deep at the back, a fold at either side framing the face in nun-like simplicity. I made a dapper little coif in delicate blue-green and pink organza. It had a lot of nice sewing and looked very feminine in a fifteenth-century manner.

The wimple was not nearly as easy to make as it looked, and the fifteenth-century maiden would have to be a very fine needlewoman, I reflected. But art and camera were satisfied.

As usual after any new adventure in hats I was fired with the idea of developing it. Soon I was showing a collection of 'Shakespearean' hats: a Juliet cap, a Titania hat, even a Lady Macbeth hat. In all there were about thirteen adaptations. Evidently they looked rather nice as well as new, because *Harper's Bazaar* kindly gave a page to them.

But not all stars like hats, and lovely though she looked in some of these hats, I could not persuade Miss Bergner to wear hats in the street.

Rosalind Russell was another star I failed to convert. Charming, amusing and witty, she was fully aware what a hat did for her on the films. But a raincoat and no hat were the rule off the set.

Ann Harding was nearly the same. Tall and exquisite,

she came to me one day wearing what had once been a white felt hat. It was what I should call a 'helpless' hat. The sort of hat with no reason behind it. A hat that a callow sales-girl might press on a customer as being something that 'wouldn't date' or 'would go with anything'.

With that lovely blonde chignon it was wonderfully interesting finding hats that really did something for Miss Harding. I chose with care, I showed her just how they should be worn, and in the end was rewarded by a frank conversion and a nice order. Then came the moment to resume that 'helpless' hat. The hat that had once been white but which in the London atmosphere was now nearly carbon coloured. 'Madam,' I said, 'you cannot walk out of 23 Grosvenor Street in that hat.' She laughed and I lent her another.

It was at the studio of my old friend Matilda Etches that I first met Deborah Kerr. What a lovely person! That little *retroussé* nose, those freckles and that red-blonde hair. And with it all, a completely natural manner.

Miss Kerr was to play the leading part in a film called *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. The film was to be in colour. Would I make the hats? Here was a wonderful chance. The period was Edwardian and would lend itself marvellously.

I decided these should not be milk-and-water adaptations of the period, but real hats. *Hatty* hats. Hats that would picture something of the more languorous glamour of that age. Hats that were generous and had something to give.

First a bowler, fairly large-crowned and quite large-brimmed; swooping down the centre of the crown right on to the brim I put a seagull, its outstretched wings just tipping over the insides of the rolling brim. The hat was white and the bird delicately shaded in white and grey. Against the red-blonde waves of Miss Kerr's hair it looked really fetching.

Another hat had the immense upturned brim of the period. Peeping over the edge was a glorious mass of curling ostrich feathers. Is there any hat decoration more luxurious yet at the same time tenderly becoming?



A demure sailor, not a little trifle, but such as is worn today, a sailor with a real brim and a real crown, was yet another. And swathed across it a real veil, almost a motoring veil.

I think of those particular hats with nostalgic pleasure. Surely they must have jogged the memory of many when they were seen in the film.

The war came and Miss Kerr married, but we still met from time to time. I on my way across the square to post letters, Miss Kerr airing her newest baby and looking lovelier than ever. But, I regret to say, hatless!

A mother and daughter came to see me, both of them with a great sense of chic. The mother was still lovely, the daughter's beauty quite exquisite. The daughter's name was Vivien Leigh.

It was a name that almost overnight had leapt from anonymity to fame. A dozen dramatic critics had hailed her, all writing 'rave' notices. And, splashed on every newspaper's theatre page, was a new face. So I was not unprepared when they came.

I studied Miss Leigh's features carefully. What a tiny face; but how minutely perfect. It was joy just to think of hats to frame it. A face that can take the neatest and wittiest little hat; and yet look lovely in the biggest, most arch type. I remember making one for her in black velvet. Huge and flat, it was a siren hat, but Miss Leigh added to it a delectable grace.

The face that had so suddenly captured the film Moguls continued to captivate the cinema crowds. To the sophisticated Miss Leigh was an enchantress; to the more simple she became a dream girl. A girl to light a flame of devotion; a girl to weave fancies about.

I saw this when, during the war, I went to visit a young friend of mine lying in University College Hospital. Opposite him in the big public ward was a young sailor, seriously ill and very low. Across the corridor in a private ward lay another patient. No less a person than Leslie Henson, his husky voice as cheerful as ever.

The public ward, where nothing, or almost nothing, is private, satiated with its own communal life, was agog for any item of interest from across the corridor. Something special for lunch; a doctors' consultation; or a new visitor, and with the magic of a bush telegraph the news would be circulated throughout the big ward. On the day I was visiting my friend the news was that Vivien Leigh had been to see Mr. Henson. The pyjama-ed wag of the ward, with an expressive thumb over his shoulder towards the young lad who was so ill, whispered loudly: 'And 'e just dreams of 'er. Mad about 'er, 'e is. Talks about 'er all the time—got the reel thing, 'e 'as, poor blighter!'

I went home from the hospital and wrote to Miss Leigh. '... I am sorry to bother you... this young chap thinks you are the most wonderful woman in the world... so ill... it might help if he had a little message from you.'

I delivered the letter by hand to the Haymarket Theatre where Miss Leigh was playing in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. And when I went to the hospital the next day, I heard that the lad had received a note from Miss Leigh wishing him better and inviting him, when recovered, to come and see her act and afterwards to meet her back-stage.

And that is just what happened.

When I say that most of the stars for whom I have made hats have not been temperamental, perhaps I am being not quite truthful. Should I say that they have *nice* temperaments? And although a star may not be 'difficult' in a wayward sense, making hats for her private life, such as it is, can be quite uphill work.

At the first meeting I am often nonplussed. Inevitably in my mind, neatly pigeon-holed against the star's name, is a picture of her as this or that type, as a vamp or as a pretty girl. This preconception amounts almost to an hypnotic spell.

She turns up in my showroom perhaps not looking her prettiest and wearing a mackintosh. The disappointment is terrible. In a sort of trance, my first reaction is quickly to put the 'oomph' back into the picture. Out come the

vampish and the 'pretty girl' hats. But the picture in my mind has perhaps been false, which only shows how astonishingly well the lady has been playing her parts. But the dilemma is still there; the star is disinterested in what I show her, and I am abashed. A new start has to be made.

There is also the star who believes that a hat may detract from her looks, may command attention which she does not wish to have taken from herself. For her a hat must be a hat and not a hat. It must be attractive but not too attractive; delicious but not more delicious than she herself.

In a slightly different way the same thing occurs when making hats for a couture dress designer. Every designer wants attractive hats. But naturally no designer wants a hat that would steal his own thunder.

If making off-the-set hats can be difficult, it is making them for a film that really starts the fun.

There is the star to be considered.

There is the dress designer.

There is the producer.

There is the cameraman.

There is the continuity girl.

And, worst of all, there is the electrician.

The star has her fads. The dress designer says the hat does not express the *feeling* of the dress. The producer is thinking of the scenic effect and the character of the heroine. The cameraman says you cannot have a brim like that making a pattern all over the face; or a feather getting lost in the background; or a bow hiding the nape of her neck. The continuity girl says that all that tulle will spoil and never be the same in the next take.

But: 'Gor blimey,' says the electrician from a fifty-five foot ladder. 'I can't get no lights on her nose. What the 'ell can I do with 'er eyes?' Or something like that.

And the electrician is omnipotent.

It is all rather fun in a way. But rather strenuous fun.

An extreme case of this sort was that of George Arliss and the hat for little Heather Angel. They were making a film together, and I was making the hats for Miss Angel.

Part of Mr. Arliss's stock-in-trade was his profile, and naturally he never failed to use it. Part of Miss Angel's charm was her youth, so for her I made some attractive young hats with, as was the vogue in those days, a tilt to one side. The hats were delivered, compliments exchanged and everything presumed to be all right.

They were young hats; they were pretty hats; I could not imagine what could be wrong when the frantic telephone call came from the studio.

They were ready to shoot and the hats were no good at all. They would have to be remade. Immediately. IMMEDIATELY!

It seemed that the view of Mr. Arliss's famous profile from one side was infinitely to be preferred to that from the other side. And all those pretty hats which dipped to one side made it impossible for Miss Angel and Mr. Arliss to meet without either obscuring little Miss Angel's face or else showing the wrong side of Mr. Arliss's profile.

I remade the hats; satisfying Mr. Arliss, box office and bobby-soxers. And even the electrician.

When I first met Matilda Etches she was living in a mews just off Harley Street. Later when, as a dress designer for the stage and films, her fame grew, she moved to Soho. And that Soho studio; oh! it was a great place.

Experience and knowledge are fine things. But is there anything that quite equals the ardour of youth? The glow and warmth of young enthusiasms; the eagerness and the zeal? One could always be sure of meeting some bright spirit at that first studio of Matilda Etches's. There would be artists, there would be young actors and actresses for whom Miss Etches was designing clothes. They came from the West End theatre, from the Old Vic, from the ballet.

It was there one night that I first met a lady who was to soar to the most prized place in her profession. She came with her mother, Mrs. Cookham—and her name was Margot Fonteyn.

Robert Helpmann was about to do Hamlet as a ballet, with Margot Fonteyn as Ophelia. Leslie Hurry was to

design the costumes, and Miss Etches was to execute them.

How intensely we were moved when Leslie opened his portfolio and produced the sketches of Ophelia's dresses, Hamlet's doublet, the sword belt and costumes for Gertrude, Laertes, Polonius and Claudius arranged for ballet.

Poor Matilda, as excited as anyone, was fighting valiantly against a headache. The clothes were intricate and needed a lot of work apart from the cutting. And Leslie was pernickety. But we were a crowd, enthusiastic and ready to help. Mrs. Cookham, Margot Fonteyn and everybody who could use a needle or make themselves useful in any way set to. We stitched and we sewed and we fitted until Leslie was satisfied. Did it matter what the clock registered? Time seemed unlimited in those days.

I subsequently had the pleasure of making many, many hats for Miss Fonteyn. And, too, the still greater pleasure of seeing Miss Fonteyn dance not only in England but also in Denmark, where there developed a great friendship between the Sadlers' Wells Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet.

Strassner is another designer who specializes in film costumes and he could probably tell more tales than I. But there is one incident we shared. It was about 1938 and Miss Constance Bennett, a very lovely and very extravagant star, was in London. I think it must have been soon after her marriage. She and her new husband, the Marquis de la Falaise, were staying in London. I received a call from Claridge's. Miss Bennett was making a film, would I come and see her about some hats?

I arrived at Claridge's to find that others had also been summoned to the presence. There was Strassner, who was to make the dresses, there was a hairdresser, there was a shoemaker and at the end of the queue myself. And a little later her charming husband also joined the queue. The minutes ticked by and no Miss Bennett. It was hours later when she arrived.

Miss Bennett's head size was large and that meant considerable work. And although the hat had to look as though

it were worth only three shillings and sixpence, Miss Bennett was still very particular about it. With wonderful unconcern she ordered fitting after fitting of hats, shoes and dresses. But rarely was she punctual. We waited and we waited and we waited. Mr. Strassner, the shoemaker and myself. And quite often the charming husband too.

What Mr. Strassner's bill was like I do not know. But, for my part, I have never charged so much money for so little hat.

A hat that was interesting to make was one for Frances Day. She came to my showrooms in Grosvenor Street in slacks, her flaxen mane flowing and her huge pet dog bounding at her side. It was about the time that she was enchanting everyone with a lovely little song, 'It's d'lightful, it's d'licious, it's d'lovely'. I am sure that even those Londoners who had not heard her singing it on the stage would nevertheless have had a recording of it, for those were the days when everybody played the gramophone.

'I want a hat for Ascot,' said Miss Day.

'It's d'lightful. It's d'lovely. It's d'lirious.' The refrain spun in my mind. Miss Day showed me a sketch of the frock she was to wear.

'I want to look like a nun,' she said. One never can tell!

During the war I made hats for Phyllis Calvert, and used as my motif the little flowers called London pride. Much as I admire the originality of Mr. Noel Coward, it was long before his famous song 'London Pride'. On the desolate bombed sites the tiny little pink and white flower with its lovely pin-cushion leaves was beginning to show everywhere. It was a rather moving sight; something to make one pause and wonder at the little flower's irrepressibility. It occurred to me that here was a lovely hat story for 'export'.

I approached *Vogue*. Yes, it would make good publicity. I set to work and made a number of navy blue hats all trimmed with London pride. Miss Calvert wore them and Mr. Cecil Beaton photographed them. *Vogue* pictured them.

A star who paid me a charming compliment was Greer Garson. I had known her from my earlier days, and when she came over from America to make the sequel to *Mrs. Miniver* she telephoned straight away.

'I'm in a stew, Mr. Thaarup. I have been given some hats to wear in a film. I do not like them. They do not express me. Can you help?'

It was after the war and my premises were then in Brook Street. The lift that day was not working, and I was on the second floor. She came with her husband, a delightful chap who was an oil magnate; with them were one or two others. At the top of the stairs the party paused and Miss Garson stretched out her hand: 'Mr. Thaarup, you must have worked as hard as I have.'

None of the stars I have hatted has ever suggested learning how to make hats; except one, Miss Evelyn Laye. And I do believe, although perhaps she has only joked about it, she would make a very good milliner. Her flair for wearing hats is tremendous.

I was delighted when I was approached to judge an Easter Bonnet Parade in Luton. Luton will always have a special place in my heart. Back in Copenhagen, before ever I had learned of Luton's importance and fame, the name had made its mark with me because of the stamps I used to peel off the parcels from that town.

Would I choose some famous personality as a co-judge? I thought of Miss Laye. I knew she was a public favourite, and that she knew about hats.

It was a great day. The Mayor received us. We drove up and down the streets of Luton. Every man, woman and child seemed to be there either in the street or hanging precariously from a window. They cheered Miss Laye and they waved to her, or the men blew her kisses. I bathed myself in all this glory and for an hour at least vicariously knew what it was like to be a stage star.

A little later Miss Laye was packing to fulfil an engagement in Australia. For this trip I made, as I sometimes do for people travelling by air, a collection of

hats that can, so to speak, be multiplied. Some hats had brims which took off, thus giving two quite different hats. Some hats had alternative trimmings. A flower and a leaf, or a feather and a veil. I think there were five hats in this collection but they could be dressed up as twelve or fourteen.

The trip was hugely successful for Miss Laye and not without kudos for me, for there had been photographs and stories about the hats.

Back in London more success for Miss Laye. A striking comeback on the London theatre boards and a wholesale acclaim of her worth. I missed the opening night for I was just going to New Zealand. But as soon as I returned I sent her a bunch of red roses with my love and admiration.

'I am so sorry,' wrote Miss Laye. 'You were away when this started. And I'm not wearing your hats. I feel AWFUL. You can't come and see it. You must wait. Maybe it will run long enough to want new hats; then please will you do them?'

Her prediction was right. I made the new hats and when I delivered them she said, 'There are good times and there are bad times in life. I like to remember those people who were good to me when the bad times happened.'

My friend, Terence Rattigan, wrote a play called *Love in Idleness*. He wrote it especially for Lynn Fontanne and her equally famous husband, Alfred Lunt. Telephoning me one day Terence told me: 'Aage, I am writing a play. I would so like you to make the hat for it. But the story "guys" the hat. Any objections?' There is only one thing to say to a man like that.

I adored making that hat. Miss Fontanne looked beautiful wearing it. My interest was in making hats, and she was interested in the theatre, but we were able to exchange a lot of ideas.

The play was produced and Miss Fontanne in the lead gave a lovely performance. In the second act someone said, 'I do so admire your hat.'



'Oh, do you? Aage Thaarup made it for me. He's so clever, don't you think?'

'Brilliant, positively brilliant! I must start going to him again.'

Comes the end of the play and some characters are turning the pages of a socialite magazine. One of them, looking at a photograph, says: 'My God, she's still wearing that same idiotic hat . . .'

## CHAPTER VII

HAT-making has projected me into all sorts of lively adventures. It has led me down many honeysuckled lanes. It has enabled me to scale more than one undreamed-of height.

The adventures and the honeysuckle I count to have been as rewarding as any financial gain. Recalling the moments of success, it was at the time always the hat or hats that seemed important.

To have moulded, bent, twisted, sheared, decorated, according to my motive, that was the important thing. And at the instant of knowing that I had 'got' it, that was all that mattered.

Curiously too, having succeeded in some special aspiration, at the moment of fitting the hat, whether on an illustrious client, a humble one or a model-girl, suddenly, it seemed an easy accomplishment. Out of the clouds shone the sun I had been seeking; the harassments and stormy difficulties were quite forgotten—momentarily, that is.

But when I sit down to think about it, and about what goes towards making a successful hat, the deliberation and the reconnoitring, the delegation of details, the perils encountered and surmounted, the diligence required, the finesse of hand, and the need for a sure eye, I almost marvel that a model hat should not be considered to be an eighth wonder. And I must presume that ladies who protest at the price of some seemingly simple triumph with a neat silk label inside have no inkling of the long hours worked by the owner of the name thus inscribed. Because, of course, it is the boss who always works the longest.

Not that I underrate the value of assistance. The girls who actually stitch the hats together are *invaluable*. They are craftswomen and I should be lost without them. For though I learned many useful accomplishments from my mother and added to that useful store by lessons from that other more fearful mother—necessity, so far I have eluded the sewing class. I can mould a hat; I can push it into shape; I can cast a most exacting eye on the dip of a hollow, the position of a bow. I can fix it all in my mind's eye to a hair's breadth. But, given a needle and thread and felt, I am useless. I cannot replace a button on my coat; and I fear on my last climb upwards I may have holes in my socks.

It is difficult to say where a hat begins and ends. Separating the ingredients necessary to its creation, I make three groups.

Inspiration.

Imaginative wholesale suppliers.

Good work-girls.

And each of the three is dependent on the other two.

Of inspiration I make no special virtue. To me it is one of the easier parts of the business. It is as natural as living. Essentially it stems, I think, from a love of life. Perhaps a bit of sensitivity is a help. But there it is, to be plucked from the air one breathes.

One can be walking down Piccadilly, one can be shopping for a pound of steak in the King's Road, one can be lying in one's bath; something in a shop window, some chance reflection in the mind and an idea sidles in.

At a party, one is hungrily lending one ear to one person and the other to another. Across the space two words will wing towards each other, forge themselves together and evoke a picture that makes an idea. These are sunshiny moments. In an almost mesmeric trance one passes the olives or buys the pound of steak or hurries down Piccadilly.

The pretty girls at the party pass unnoticed, the butcher's levity unregarded. Sometimes I have even found myself with thirty minutes and two miles unaccounted for, but cosily wrapped in the cocoon of my mind is the grub that

will flutter, as a butterfly, round my showrooms next week or next month or next season. It waits only for the handicraft of my workroom for it to be the first butterfly of that species.

If inspiration is lacking there is a sure way of courting it. It is as simple as a game of Boule. And as in Boule, sooner or later a winning number is bound to turn up. Of course the run of luck is just as chancy, but in this case the stake is only time; just ten minutes of time every day. Regardless of whether there are ten hats all wanted by last night; whether one has a cold in the head and a temperature of one hundred and five; whether the first saleswoman has torn the hair off the second saleswoman; whether there are birds and flowers and little children playing in the park to make one linger on the way to work.

It is early in the morning that this valuable ten minutes must be spared and the rendezvous is the stockroom. For, of course, as soon as one begins to be established a stockroom becomes a pleasant necessity. A place where the materials, the hoods, the spartra, the wire, the tulle, the feathers and the flowers are kept; all the appurtenances of hat making. And when the lady dragon in charge can be prevailed upon to open all the cupboards it is an Aladdin's cave.

But at nine o'clock in the morning the cupboards will all be closed, the trestle tables bare. Perhaps one of the chairs is occupied, however, for it is at this hour that the travellers call. They come from the big wholesale importers and manufacturers all round Oxford Circus, Great Marlborough Street and Great Portland Street. Or they come from some little room in Soho.

They come with shiny bags and cases; with well-worn ones. With battered trunks, with bright, new-painted boxes. They come with crinkly, crumpled paper bags.

And their mien and step is just as diverse; as shabby, despondent and shapeless as some of the bulging fibre cases; as well-nourished and tanned as the hide ones; as perky and bright as the new-painted boxes; as faded and crumpled as the paper bags.

It is their living to trot round London selling their wares. And remembering the days when I, too, carried a paper bag, when I sat in Hyde Park and cried with exhaustion and frustration, how could I be less than sympathetic and polite to these honest people? But if politeness is automatic, it is also good business. One never knows what might be in that closed brown bag on that busy morning. It might be just *the* morning when that particular bag carries the most beautiful idea of the season.

I am sufficiently egotistical, too, to have faith in my own curiosity, power of investigation and ability to confirm a new idea. Here are mines, some explored but nevertheless still capable of suddenly showing a golden streak. One must be quick to recognize it.

Some mornings there will be straws from Switzerland, another day a flower from France, a piece of velvet from Lyons or satin from Milan. These come from the big people.

But it is the little person who interests me. The tiny Czech woman; a frail little thing, a refugee. Her large brown orbs peer sombrely from their blue-white surround, the worn hands clutch a much-used paper bag. But open it, and there is revealed an exquisitely made ornament.

Or the little old gentleman with the silver moustache. Old! He must be a hundred; he climbs my stairs with difficulty, shuffling his feet and wheezing a little. But once in the stockroom, he shows a grace, an old-fashioned grace that makes one feel slightly humble. He works for a firm not in the top flight of fashion but sound and to be relied on for quite good material. He knows I like only the best material and, so honest is he and so transparent, one can almost tell from his grip on his bag whether he has something good or only something indifferent to show me. I can see him now, the glint on his spectacles, and the confident handling of the bag on a good morning; the faint look of shame when he has something not quite first-class.

The quickening of inspiration is a magic moment. But a creative artist needs skilled manual help and it remains for

my work-people actually to construct the hat. And on their talent a great deal depends.

The first workers I ever had were men; tough, red-bearded Mohammedans. That was back in my early days in India, as I have already related. Cross-legged, they sat and stitched with incredible fidelity. They ranked amongst the finest needlemen in the world, and thus I began with very high standards indeed.

But I must be lucky, because when I started in Europe, without much experience as an employer, I again managed to get assistants with very high standards. It was luck, because fine handwork even in those days was something that was getting rarer and rarer, harder and harder to find. Some of the girls I have had have been wonderful girls. They not only stitched well but were able to translate my directions with real feeling. They enjoyed their work and they got as excited as I did myself over a success. Many of them stayed with me for years; some are still with me.

My ways with my workroom have not always been orthodox. It was a usual practice in a firm such as mine to have someone, a sort of woman major-domo, responsible for the workroom and competent to act as liaison between the head and the work-girls. It was usual, too, to have a head milliner who could also act for the work-girls when it was necessary to see a client.

But I cannot conduct things like that. Had I tried to do so, I am sure that I could never have met with the gallant enthusiasm that has been my lucky lot. Working in that roundabout way, how many nuances of feeling, how many tiny differentiations, might not have been dropped in transit and swept up with the workroom pins? How many valorous victories over difficulties, if left uncredited, might not have seemed unworthwhile to these ladies with needle and thread?

My method is to speak with each girl, whether she is just starting at sixteen or is fifty-nine and an 'old' girl. I like to explain the job to her personally; I like her to feel that she has her part in the hat's creation.

And when I find talent, when I find a girl who has got 'it' . . . I get really excited. Bless me, that is when I get into hot water too. The dickheads have a simple plan for all young people.

One year making tea.

One year going to the post office.

One year stitching headbands.

But I do not see things like that. When a girl is intelligent and shows sensitivity about hats, I throw my own hat into the air. I do everything I can to encourage her. I let her go ahead as fast as she can.

It is I, who cannot stitch a hat elastic into place, who should make the tea!

'Put that hat on your head,' I will say to a work-girl. Or, 'It will need to be a little deeper here for this customer. Can you see, it needs more width here or the chic line of the waisted crown will be lost.'

And so on. And finally, after insisting on the greatest exactness, I like the work-girl, if possible, to come down and see the finished hat on the customer's head. That, to me, is not only a thank-you to the girl, but a vital part of her training.

Every woman whose thoughts stray towards the unseen processes of hat-making thinks of a wooden block. It is a symbol of all the mysterious things that happen behind the workroom doors. If she is middle-aged she will remember the old dry-cleaning firms with their grave assortment of bottle-green and nigger-brown pieces of headgear, and their mourning-edged cards advertising hats to be cleaned and *reblocked*. It all contributed to the shibboleth of the inescapable hatblocks.

In the old days, wooden blocks could be bought for next to nothing but, like so many trades, block-making is dying out. The craftsmanship necessary to carve an intricate block is very considerable, and when one finds an artisan capable of this, the cost is now very big; perhaps as much as £25. Nor is that the whole price.

I am not very fond of beer, but I have swallowed more beer and paid for more pints, and sweated more in getting good wooden blocks made, than in pursuing any other form of exercise. For carpentry, it seems, is a thirsty sport. By the time I have got my man really to understand that I want a fold a little bit more to the right here, and the crown a little bit higher there, it has been nearly closing time.

Wooden blocks will always be necessary for big orders, and when I branched out into wholesale manufacture I used them. But quite early in my career in model millinery I discovered their drawbacks and discarded their use.

Piracy has always been a bugbear of the model trade. No sooner had fame touched my name ever so lightly with her gilt brush than I became the prey of every magpie milliner. Mysteriously, the most intricately dented and folded hat straight from the wooden block that was my new line, and that had cost so many sovereigns and been contrived over so many glasses of mild and bitter, would be almost simultaneously duplicated in Madame X's window.

Ingenuously, I at first attributed this to a perplexing miracle. But the thought trickled in later that more sovereigns and more mild and bitter might have been involved.

In place of the wooden block, I adopted the French idea of a spartra block. It is a day's job to make a good spartra block. First the wetting of the plaited grass, the stretching and moulding into shape, the building up with more bits of spartra, strips of newspaper or whatever recommends itself. When the shape has been approved it is wired and, to give it solidity, a coat of plaster of Paris is added. It is important when this is done that the spartra shape should be what is called 'true', so though I may have worked with a second- or third-class girl for the initial stages of the shape, I always give the job of applying finishing coats of plaster of Paris and lacquer to a first-class girl or even put them on myself. A tiny bit of shrinkage in the wrong place and the real chic of the hat is lost. It is too terribly easy at this stage of construction to ruin a day's work. But with success there is a block from which up to twelve hats can be made.



And with the block never having left my workrooms, I am immune from that shattering experience of seeing a 'double' of my hat just round the corner!

It is a bit like sculpture. You take this bit of spartra or millinery material and shape and mould it. All the time your eye and hand tell you whether you are succeeding. I can go into my workroom, pick up a hat and, though a girl may have worked on it for ten hours or twelve hours, I can see immediately if she has lost something. It may be a bit too wide on this side or too shallow on that; lopsided or uneven.

It is important for me to have the hat in my hands. When I am fitting a hat, I feel the same need, and customers are sometimes a bit disturbed by this. But there is a great knack in putting on a hat, and if possible I insist on showing how this should be done. Certain heads must have the hat 'screwed' on from the side, others are put on from the front and turned as they are settled back. It just depends. Women's heads can be as bewilderingly different as their hearts.

Sometimes in creating a new hat, even when there is a brilliant notion to help it along, a contrary mood will settle on things. The hat will be put on a model girl a dozen times. Two dozen times. And still it is no good. Now the French head is Latin and roundish in shape, and it so happens that I have what is called an Anglo-Saxon skull—much more like the English and the Scottish. So in desperation I will take that hat and, behind locked doors, manipulate it on myself till I get it right. Or I try to. But sometimes even that drastic essay will not serve. The hat goes into a box, a sort of limbo for hats that cannot yet work out their destiny. Six months or two years later it comes out, and with a fresh eye I immediately know what is wanted.

Well, it is a dull November morning and it is time to think of spring shapes. There may be snow on the ground, there may be an influenza epidemic, but the hats must look very fresh, very gay; tender, disarming.

Or it may be a very warm day and then it is velvet and plush and fur which must be considered. And with no jaundiced eye, but with the conviction that it would be enchanting to have ears muffled and hands warmed by a muff.

Let us say it is a snowy day; it is a day with icicles. I have made the shape; shall I make the hat in Swiss straw, in braid that is only half an inch wide? Shall I take an exotic straw that came from Java, or Singapore, or Panama; or a piece of linen made in Ireland, a piece of Paisley cotton? Or shall I use French satin; an Italian straw hood, or my favourite, a Leghorn? A beautiful Leghorn, flaunting a handsomeness that no other straw has. Alas, I have too few of these.

I decide. And then, if I am in a practical frame of mind, I think of a customer. There are some I know who will like to have a hat from me whether it is April or October and whether it is made in Berkeley Street or Bywater Street.

So I think of Mrs. Mitchell. Mrs. Mitchell likes navy, navy with a touch of white. I make my hat with Mrs. Mitchell in mind and when the snow has gone and there are crocuses in the parks and the first spring sunshine is 'x-raying' every wardrobe door, I telephone Mrs. Mitchell.

'I thought of you in November. It is a little thing in navy and white. Am I right?'

'Yes, Mr. Thaarup. I'll be along tomorrow.'

I may have no one in mind. I may choose an Italian straw braid in pale leaf green simply in revolt against the murky gloom outside. Shall I trim it? I will. Because I think trimming suits English women. Perhaps I will make the trimming interchangeable so that the hat can be sober for church on Sunday morning, gay for tea in the afternoon. It is an old custom of mine, dating from the hats I made in India. There a hat had to be worn all the time for protection, and if a lady was unable to afford many hats she would have them plain so that they might be worn for tennis in the morning, and, with a nice bit of trimming tacked on, for cocktails in the evening!

So I am standing with this green hat in my hand! I go into the stockroom and ask the stockroom-keeper to open the cupboards that are hiding the spring flowers. They do not smell, but their colours are pretty. There are snow-drops, crocuses, violets; moss roses which I love; and mignonne which I love even more. There are dandelions, there are blooms so varied that a seedsman's catalogue would be put out of countenance.

Shall I try this one or that one? One has leaves too long and the other too clumpy. Neither gives the right effect or finish to the hat. The trimming jars and, to the awful amazement and discomfiture of everyone, I send the hat back to the workroom with instructions for it to be made in black satin as a cocktail hat. An inch deeper on one side and covered with embroidery.

I am only following my instinct for getting the hat right. But to my workroom and stockroom people it must seem that I am acting quite contrary to reason. I suppose that is how a legend for being temperamental is born.

Artificial flowers, which I like very much, often prove the most difficult of trimmings. They tease, not through any inherent awkwardness but through social complications. Especially in making hats for Royal ladies do flowers present difficulties.

For a flowered hat, though it might very properly become the occasion, still risks the hazard of vying with the bouquet which is almost certain to be presented to the Royal lady. La France roses might look enchanting on the hat, but how can one foretell just what the inevitable little pig-tailed girl or blushing 'deb.' will contribute to the picture? She may present a glorious arrangement of white lilac; but, perhaps, a bunch of sweet peas!

So, I always advise any lady who is likely to receive a bouquet to have her hat flowerless; instead, a simple tulle or veiling trim. And the same advice holds good for all mothers-in-law. Poor darlings, they get so put upon that at some stage of the wedding festivities they are almost

*Margot Fonteyn, in  
1944, wears a Chinese-  
style hat*



*Miniature hats to be  
given as presents and  
exchanged for full-sized  
models by the recipients*



Deborah Kerr wearing  
an Edwardian hat in  
the film 'The Life and  
Death of Colonel  
Blimp



Another hat worn by  
Miss Kerr in the same  
film

certain to be found laden with the bride's or the bridesmaid's bouquet, or perhaps both.

Even the bride must be careful. If a bouquet is to be carried I think it looks better if the head-dress is plain. But orange-blossom is traditional, and many brides will not do without it.

When I made the head-dress for that charming person, 'Little Mo', I had just that riddle to solve. My old friend, Teddy Tinling, had made the frock, and had embroidered on it orange-blossom and lilies-of-the-valley. Already there were two kinds of flower on the frock and there were to be flower bouquets. I skirted the difficulty by making a plain little Alsatian 'coif', to be worn rather far back, with orange-blossom appliquéed on the lace points.

I must qualify my admission of a liking for artificial flowers. The flowers must look real. Art, of course, can be allowed to play its part. The rose petals can be exaggeratedly velvety, the lily-of-the-valley blossoms a little bolder and the leaves even cooler than in nature; the anemone stamens more pollen-laden. But real, even if with the reality of dreams.

The flowers must also look good. No ill-made stems or ragged leaves; no papery petals, or beady centres. There are not a great number of people who can make good artificial flowers so I am prepared for them always to be rather a big price. Though perhaps not quite as big a price as I paid two girls for some Australian wattle.

I met the two girls on my return from my first visit to Australia. Two such nice, gay girls, they lived just outside London and the Australian magazines having told them all about my visit they came to see me with a sample of wattle and one of the flannel flower. They had made these flowers exquisitely—spider's web and all—and, wishing to pay my new-found Australian friends a compliment, I ordered some of these. Alas, repeat orders were not possible; one bunch of flowers had taken the two girls a week to make!

In my very early days in Paris I was introduced to one of those back-street families of flower-makers which can

only be found in that city . . . a remnant of a strange ant-like culture . . . a world of curiously fixed outlook. The particular family I met concentrated on making La France roses. Mother, father, daughter, niece, aunt and grandmother; one and all participated in the trade, all drawing from it their modicum of sustenance.

So finely and so beautifully did they make these roses that though the supply of them was limited, they were known not only in Paris but in other capitals too. How came these people to possess the power to transform idle silk, velvet, wire and gum into these astonishingly lovely and lifelike blooms? The alchemy of a bit of brown earth seems more implicit than the blossoming of these flowers in their unprepossessing birthplace.

One passed through the first drab courtyard into the second, this one more enclosed and a little damp-smelling. No *concierge*, but evidences of a multiplicity of destinies being worked out behind each of the many windows; a pair of trousers hanging limply from one, some children's faces at another, a row of bottles on a window-sill.

Climbing the stairs to the fourth floor, one made one's way through the varying barriers of garlic, coffee and urine. Through those so-French double doors and you were in the 'factory' you sought. It was also a dining-room and a living-room and I am not sure whether it was not, too, the old grandmother's bedroom.

It was not until 1937 that I found my way again up those four flights of stairs. I was on the point of making a collection for America and a chance sight of some daffodils by the roadside had given me an idea. I wanted some dandelions. Where could I get them? Of course . . . Monsieur X and his family.

Nothing had changed. Monsieur was perhaps a little more portly and had need to edge himself round the dining-table a little more expertly. But the flowered wallpaper, the clutter, the signs of living and of flower-making were the same.

'Dandelions, monsieur? Dandelions?'

The Gallic underlip pouted in that conventional downward pose of disbelief; the brows lowered. 'Dandelions?' Much slow head-wagging.

'*Qu'est-ce que c'est un Dandelion? C'est une fleur?*'

Monsieur stroked his moustache, leaned his third chin on his hand, called to Maman, Marie-Thérèse, Jeanne, Michel. With a huge botanical book in front of him, the whole family poring over his shoulder, each pointing and commenting on the possibilities that the next page might reveal, we finally tracked down a dandelion.

'*Aah-h, monsieur. C'est le PISSENLIT vous désirez? Mais nous n'avons pas fait le PISSENLIT depuis POIRET! 1910.*'

'But look,' he added, 'you shall have it tomorrow. Yes? Tomorrow.'

The old man made the dandelion. It was perfection. Looking at it you could smell the grass and hear the cows munching.

I might buy flowers from France but I never bought ideas. If I may be excused from boasting, I have never felt any dearth of ideas. As for forecasting fashion, one simply 'feels' what is going to happen. Shoulders are going to do this . . . it is inevitable. There will be an Edwardian revival, or a Victorian one. Or the silhouette is going to fine down and demand a bigger hat. One feels it in one's bones.

In any case there is no fun in sitting down waiting to see what other people are going to do. The fun lies in trying to pierce the future for oneself. To do this one must be alive to a dozen different influences, influences as far apart as the lengthening of skirts and the visit of a potentate from Timbuctu.

There is, of course, a certain evolution in fashion, but prediction remains a gamble. Perhaps I will take a piece of polka-dotted linen and line it with salmon pink, or I will put my money on Breton sailors. When six months later the newspaper reports say that polka-dotted linen is the Paris rage and that 'Bretons are Back', I feel I have got something. It spoils me a bit. And yet . . . I am just as



nervous the next season. Am I going to do red hatters' plush and pheasant feathers, or WHAT?

There is no question in my mind that Paris is the arbiter of fashion. It is in Paris that one finds the greatest output of originality, charm and real chic. Quite rightly, the fashion trade in all countries looks there.

But the laudable desire of buyers and manufacturers to seek out this source of inspiration is not in my view working out with the results desired. Like a returning boomerang it hits back. Instead of the finely copied Paris hat that might be on every woman's head, the mass-produced hat, though a wonderful article, is taking a very limited variety of forms. And I am sorry to say that it seems to me also that the very worship that Paris had inspired has, in a circuitous fashion, resulted in some debasement of their talent.

I am speaking particularly of the American mass producing industry. The big American manufacturers went to Paris because what every American woman wanted was a 'Paris' hat. It is a tradition; it is the same all over the world. A hat should be French, or have some French touch about it. If one could say, 'This is the latest from Paris,' then it would sell, even if it were made in Minnesota.

So the manufacturers had to go to Paris. The fashion papers, which are great leaders of public taste, had contributed to the demand. The buyers of the big stores all wanted a trip to Europe, and so it came about.

Before the war there were a number of old-established firms; Suzy, Legroux Sœurs and Reboux—Reboux especially, with their wonderful '*grande dame*' hats; hats speaking of an elegance that is past, of tradition and of beautiful workmanship, yet all completely individual.

With the invasion of buyers from across the Atlantic there sprang up a new coterie of hat designers. But though the Americans had for years been used to copying Paris models, the war interim had seen enormous strides in the machinery for mass-producing hats.

It is this machinery, designed to give every woman her dream of a Paris hat, which, in fact, is limiting that very

ideal. The machine can do wonderful things. It can produce a marvellous facsimile of a model shape. It can do what it costs a model milliner ten pounds to do, for a mere nothing. And it can do it by the thousand.

But the scramble to compete for the American dollars of these machines sent things a little astray. Inevitably the question came up: what could the machine do most easily? The American manufacturer naturally looked to this. The poor Paris designer was forced to follow suit. So the whole of the model millinery industry was influenced. One no longer designed a hat for an individual face, one designed it because the voracious machine could eat it up fast.

One no longer used pink velvet bows, or poppies under the brim, or crowns nipped in here and swelling there simply because one loved those things. One designed for the machine that could do something else in half the time. That is how the cheap hat is designed and made now. Pom, pom, pom, pom, pom, pom, pom. POM!

Trimming is something that has to be handled artistically. Though the mass-produced hat can be wonderful if the original is faithfully copied and not modified to suit the exigencies of the machine, the trimming can still spell disaster. The feather that is stuck on with a bit of gum, the bow that is run over by the sewing machine is not always beautifully placed. And when the hats have been made in their thousands and the trimmings in their ten thousands and, like the husband and wife in a French farce, the two do not meet till they are married, they can be dreadfully ill-matched.

What I call the 'glint' and the 'glimmer' provides an instance of this. It is a thing that has started since the war, a vogue for shimmer and shine, for spangle and sparkle. In the right place it is all very well, but one begins now to see it not only on evening hats, but on every possible other sort.

I thought I had seen the worst, until I was brought up sharp by a peaked cap, and the peak, *studded with diamonds*.

It nearly killed me!

## CHAPTER VIII

**L**IME GREEN and orange; cool blues and magenta. Tawny reds, smoky blues; violets. These were the colours of 1938, the last year of an era.

The ever-changing backcloth of the social scene rolled by charged with brilliance, as if contrived by some artist who knew he was existing on borrowed time. For the war was only a year away.

And never were there so many hats.

For the well-to-do they could be had from a model milliner at five guineas a time. The middle-class woman cheerfully paid two guineas a time at a store and as cheerfully assigned the hat to 'nanny' or cook-general at the first hint of staleness.

'Mummy, you simply can't wear the *same* hat for half-term.'

Even the working-class, brooding though the scene might be, wore hats. Only gipsies went hatless.

It was the day of the toy hat, the saucy little bit of Edwardian flattery perched forward over the brow; attractive, gay and tender. With it went upswept hair styles. Did the hats dictate the hair styles, or did the new hair and hat arrive simultaneously? Paul Holt, writing in the *Daily Express* with tongue in cheek, pleaded to be preserved from the new 'vamp'. 'The *avant-garde* of fashion,' he wrote, 'wears her hair up and a toy hat over one eye.'

'I see clearly a return to hansoms, bouquets and dance programmes,' he added.

Probably Madame Schiaparelli was more responsible for the 'dolls' size of this hat fashion than any other designer.

The Edwardian revival was universal, but it was 'Schiap' who crystallized the feeling for something exaggeratedly frivolous. What a talented woman and how delightfully natural and unaffected she is about her work.

I remember our first meeting at a party and how she invited me to come and see her place in Upper Grosvenor Street. We made a tour of the house. One room, the white furniture upholstered in quilted satin, appealed to me greatly. I have no shame in acknowledging that I loved it so much that I borrowed the idea for my own sitting-room.

But how many top designers would freely invite another to come into their workrooms? That was 'Schiap's' way. She opened all the cupboards, revealing a magic, never-ending cascade of bright evidence of her genius. Such originality, such a wonderful flair for using distinctive colour. The fact that 'shocking' pink has almost found its way into the dictionary is testimony of this.

I was delighted to return the invitation and felt truly pleased with the nice compliments I then received, and charmed by a little gift she sent me later, a silk tie printed all over like a newspaper. Just another of the new ideas which she threw off with such facility.

Though hats were tiny they were not mean. In their miniature way they were lush with ornament, with fine work and good trimmings. The revival called for ermine and mink and foxtail; for ostrich tips to peep over the brim or plumes to trail deliciously; for tulle elaborately ruched and stitched; taffeta quilted and chiffon pleated.

There were little pill-boxes in velvet, absurd postillions in shining panne, little saucer Bretons in fine felt, toques in pheasant feathers all hand-stitched.

They were all worn forward over the forehead, giving a line here, a mass there, a tiny shadow, a provocative bit of colour, yet still allowing plenty of hair to show. They had, of course, to be made in proportion to the head, but when that was done they possessed—to my mind—a world of disarming flattery.

For full measure, to all these hats was added veiling. Veiling as fine as spiders' web, as stiff as horsehair or as wide-meshed as fishing net. It shrouded the eyes mysteriously, it sat up in perky bows or it draped to the side and wound round the throat. There were endless coquettish ways of using it. Kittenish, you might think now.

It was the time of the roadhouse fashion. One lunched at Maidenhead or one dined at Dorking. A 'run' in the car was still something that could be enjoyed. In Town, the 'Mirabelle' opened a garden restaurant; others emulated it with roof lounges.

And somehow, hats seemed to play quite a part in it all. A woman did not feel completely dressed without a hat. If there were to be gaiety naturally she wanted a pretty hat; if there were to be rivalry the hat must be out of the ordinary, too. In those days, a woman used a hat like a trump card; playing it when most effective. The highest trump took the trick.

It is true that women's hats throughout time have been the butt of men's wit, but how much more depressing when hat and wearer remain unremarked! There is no age in women when the Eve in her is completely dead and none when the Adam in man cannot be resuscitated. Only recently a charming, middle-aged lady came to me from the country. Something a bit 'gay', she asked. I made the hat a quite sedate thing in black, but out of the side was a cluster of red feathers. It became the lady and at the same time it challenged the eye.

A week later I received a B.E.A. postcard. The postmark showed it to have been posted in Rome but it had evidently been written on the journey there. It said, 'Having wonderful flight. Hat perfect. Thoroughly enjoying it.' Was it the flight or the hat to which the lady referred? Or both?

From lunch to dinner—and to dinner hats. There had been simmering for some time in my mind thoughts about evening hats. I was thinking of hats for the restaurant. Surely, quite apart from their quality of chic, it could be

argued that a woman showed more propriety in wearing a hat when dining in public than in going hatless.

It was easy to think of some really charming ideas, and when these were translated into hats a number of my clients were interested. That was before the advent of the 'glint and glitter' craze of which I have spoken, and a prettily placed sparkling ornament or a sequined pattern was not only new but appropriate. I used feathers in bright hues; I used beads and velvet and sometimes a piece of the material from which the frock was made. And I worked at seeing what could be done with colour.

Now there is something curious about the wearing of colour above the forehead. It is easy enough to get a frock to match eyes or lipstick, but it is a rather bold, bald way of drawing attention to either of those features. But use just a scrap of the same shade strategically placed on the head, and the attention can be riveted.

But alas, those fine hats and those fine feathers were not to adorn the places for which they were designed. For the swank restaurants refused to allow them. If evening dress were the rule, though you might belong to the peerage or have the entrée to England's stateliest mansion, you could not wear a feather and a bit of ribbon on the head after seven o'clock.

Prostitutes, it seems, always wear hats! Or that is what one maître-d'hôtel offered as an explanation when *Vogue* tried to investigate the controversy. Crudely put, he could not take the risk that some of the diners might look like 'pick-up' girls.

I was enjoying my sunshine yellow-and-white showroom. Trade was good. I could dine well. I could travel. I could afford the theatre and treat myself to the ballet.

It was the ballet which gave me an idea for one of my shows at the Curzon Cinema. 'Ballet and Bonnets' I would call it, and the hats should all be inspired by the ballet. And I would have a ballet-dancer, too.

I got busy on the hats. Ideas tumbled over one another; there seemed a dozen different, enchanting ways of inter-

preting each ballet. But I was anxious to push on to the actual presentation of the show. For *Lac des Cygnes* I made a little thing in white swansdown with white wings down the front. For *Spectre de la Rose*, a small black straw almost covered by a big rose and shrouded in gossamer black net. For *Sylphides*, a romantic arrangement of blue tulle and pink rosebuds with two blue cellophane wings standing up at the back. I went through the whole gamut of classical ballets with which by now I was familiar.

Now for 'Aage's ballet'. June Bray of Sadler's Wells consented to dance. It remained to fix the stage and all the exits and entrances. A rehearsal was called and, as an afterthought, it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to have some photographs taken.

How about the nice young man to whom I had let the basement in my Grosvenor Street premises? He was a quiet chap, who had so far only gone in for portraiture, but probably he would do this for me. Anyway, I talked him into it.

He came, he saw and he was conquered. The world knows him now as a great ballet fan, and a photographer of the first order. His name is Baron.

If I say I was enjoying my life it would be no more true then than it would be of a great many periods of my life. There was that bitter blow in my youth, there were early struggles, some suffering, but much joy. *Au fond*, I seem able always to find something interesting in life. But certainly life was now easier, richer and more varied in texture.

An experience which stands out in my mind as belonging to that year before war broke out is being summoned to Buckingham Palace. To any person, whatever his sensitivity, this must have been a great event. Simply to contemplate what lay behind those high, spiked iron railings and colourful guards was to feel intensely moved. The vastness of the building, its aura of power, would impress the most blasé. For me, the summons was the stuff of fairy tales; tales brought to vivid reality. I could still think of a palace as something from a fairy story.

As a foreigner, the summons was indeed a signal honour for me and I felt this deeply. I had been making hats for the Duchess of York for some years, taking them for fitting to 145 Piccadilly, then the home of the Duke and Duchess of York. Never could I then have imagined that, through the events which led to the abdication of King Edward VIII and the succession of the Duke of York, my footsteps one day would take me to the world's most famous palace.

To Buckingham Palace then—but I was almost as bewildered as the tailor or the shoemaker in the old fairy tales. Which entrance, which gate? Cautiously I inquired; I was told the front entrance leading to the Royal apartments. The hired car ambled down Constitution Hill to the accompaniment of a deafening roar, for it was the eve of the Coronation and the loudspeakers were being tested. How vast the courtyard seemed from inside. Two guardsmen stiffly passing each other, with poker faces beneath their bearskins, exchanged a sibilant word. Those incredibly upstanding figures and the bright uniform—I glimpsed for a moment something of the power and the glory of Britain.

The red carpet, I was sure, was not for me. But there it was. Inside, the long corridors, a footman popping out here and there, and everywhere *two* of everything. Did the foreign potentates of yore, bringing their gifts, come with *both* hands laden? *Two* immense Chinese vases, *two* huge chests, *two* settees. And, interspersed, a pictorial life-history of that august predecessor, Queen Victoria.

Upstairs, I fitted the hats to the accompaniment of the roaring loudspeakers. We put our hands to our ears, but still it was deafening. Outside again, with intent to savour the minute, I paused, but with that noise going on it was not possible. I fled.

It was about this time that I decided to get myself a house. I was busy, I was successful. But I felt that without some small *pied-à-terre* to call 'home', life was a bit empty. I had sampled flats galore, apartments, hotels, and in the crowded years of making my way, had scarcely noticed any lack. But not since my youth in Copenhagen had I



known a real home. Now I ached for one—one of my own.

I hunted London. The claims of fashionable quarters left me unmoved. Constant hot-water, porters, all the other lures failed. I was looking for something with character. Something robust and real. And I wanted it small; I wanted really to play 'house'.

I cannot help thanking Providence from time to time. Once again I was lucky, just the thing I was looking for turned up, a tiny house in Chelsea. Not more than five minutes from Sloane Square, in a quiet cul-de-sac, yet in no way divorced from the colourful life of the neighbourhood. Shops and a market, pubs and restaurants. A teeming, busy, strange, familiar, lovely, loving assortment of inhabitants. The house was simply doll-sized. A two-by-four courtyard in front, a tiny basement, a two-roomed ground floor, and two small bedrooms overhead.

I paid the rent in advance, bought a pot of paint on my way from the agent and, without waiting to move in, painted the front door. An old Danish custom!

Possessiveness and a love of ownership are not very strong in me. It was not possession that I craved. It was background. Even more fierce was a longing for beautiful surroundings. All those candlesticks and lithographs and rust-red curtains to which I had been submitted, those mock luxuries of beige carpet and art silk bedspreads, had stifled and bored me for years.

With the signing of the lease another Danish custom had to be observed. In a small paper bag, somewhere in the furthest corner of the house, I hid a tiny bit of bread and a bit of salt. It was a superstition that until the lease expired there would always be food in the house.

There were white houses, there were grey houses and dirty-white houses in the little cul-de-sac. Not a flower-box, not a bright colour in window or door. I should not like to claim that I started the Chelsea vogue for colour, but certainly mine was the first yellow front door that I

had seen. It sang like a spring daffodil against the faded colours of a February scene.

I painted the shutters yellow; I had window-boxes made and planted them with marguerites. Then I started to think of the inside, and I put my whole heart into it.

I had to buy towels and pepper-pots, things-you-pour-tea-through, things for the bathroom. Carpets and curtains and canisters; bolsters and bedsteads.

I wanted pictures, but like every generation I found something to criticize in the past. I could remember my parents' house and my grandparents', where pictures jostled each other for space, and obscured themselves in the heterogeneous mass. They made too mixed a dish for my artistic appetite.

So I bought only three pictures and, for them, only one white nail. One at a time I would enjoy my pictures.

Outside, my white marguerites bloomed; inside all was white paint and white furniture. For my sitting-room, a blue carpet and blue-quilted upholstery; the blue-quilting idea cribbed, as I have recounted, from Madame Schiaparelli.

When I had quite finished the house, back to my show-rooms, and straight away a collection of hats with a 'house' motif. A tiny picture supported by a ribbon on one, little forks and knives on another, a miniature Adam fireplace, and so on.

I could now have a lot of pleasure entertaining my friends. Three was a crowd in my little dining-room, but there were often twice that number in my sitting-room. We drank thick Turkish coffee, we sipped *fin* from wide-bowled glasses. We smoked incessantly.

'No more wine? Then we'll push back chairs and talk.'

How we talked! Of poetry and pictures; of writing and the theatre. Of design and dress. We dreamed dreams of idealistic ventures; we plotted, and best of all, sharpened our wits one against the other. And then one day, out of all the chatter and banter and only half-conceived ideas, emerged one idea that seemed possible of execution.

It was Kathryn Barber who sowed the first seed. 'Why don't you start a magazine?' she asked.

Bolder men than myself have thought twice about such an ambitious venture, but to me the idea seemed so full of fine possibilities that it would be worth a struggle.

Amongst my little group of friends there were some who could write, some who could sketch, and all were full of ideas. One of the things we had often discussed was the debased, inartistic sort of advertisement which quite good products often had at that time. How shameful that a good magazine should be forced to place in juxtaposition to literary and artistic contributions advertisements of such poverty of mind!

Ours was to be a magazine on quite other lines. The advertisements would be designed by us, and be of the same standard as the editorial matter itself. It seemed simple enough. It just meant that to the normal risk of selling advertising space would be added the expense of having first to spend time and money on designing the advertisement.

Idealistic! Crazy! Yes, but it worked. Looking back at those four issues of *Pinpoints* I think I am not being vain in admiring them. They contained the work of men and women many of whom have since become famous. The drawings are wonderfully good, some of the contributions extraordinarily witty. And interwoven are advertisements that are as much a pleasure to look at and read as the editorial part itself.

There was fashion news; there were comments on art exhibitions; there were poems and satirical pieces. Rosita Forbes wrote a piece on travel. It started: 'Do not mistake the august Colonial Secretary—whose parties are a benediction—for the Secretary of the New Colonial Hotel! . . . Don't forget to take your own husband with you unless you are quite sure that plenty of other people's will be available. . . . Don't put your faith in uncrushable materials or Planter's Punch. I have never met the first after the third round of the second.'

Mr. David de Bethel, the traveller and stage designer, contributed an article. Perhaps his recipe for Wiener Schnitzel might be quoted. ' . . . Have your butcher cut you as many Schnitzels or escallopes of veal as you need. They must be cut very thin (the only butcher who can do this is in Soho). Take a large cucumber, peel it and cut into inch-thick slices, cook in salt water, drain and put aside to use as garnish. Throw a good knob of butter into a frying-pan and when it is foaming place in your Schnitzel. When they are cooked on the one side turn them. Salt them on the side already cooked. When cooked place them on a warm dish, garnish with pieces of cucumber and keep warm while the sauce is being made. If the Schnitzel have been properly cooked there will be in the pan, in addition to the remainder of the butter, some of the juices of the meat; to this add a cupful of sweet cream and a teaspoonful of Hungarian paprika and bring to the boil, stir well and remove from the heat; add a dash of lemon juice and pour over the Schnitzel.'

Tom Harrison, just starting his now-famous Mass Observation, made an interesting survey of the masses' hats.

About veils:

AGE 50: 'It wouldn't do for me to wear them.'

AGE 40: 'It hides the blemishes.'

AGE 30: 'If you've got a nice figure and all the rest of it to carry it off, it's nice. I like a black veil for a person who's plump, like me.'

AGE 25: 'I think they are nicer for the older people.'

AGE 20: 'I don't like them at all. They are much too common now.'

There are two main seasons in hat fashions. This is reflected in the purses and on the heads of housewives. Working women under 40 investigated by us in Limehouse and Poplar bought an average of 2.7 hats a year. Those over 40 bought an average of 1.9 hats a year. In a slightly better-off area of Stepney older women bought 2.6 hats a year, younger women 3.8. All ages in fact

are able to buy one new hat at each fashion peak: spring and autumn.

So you see, there isn't much distinction between hats worn by smart socialists and hats worn by smart socialites. Both in Mayfair and the Mile End Road, there are smart women and shabby ones. In the rapid and universal spread of fashion, there is a new sort of social equality. Like the heads they adorn, 1939's hats raise a delicate intricate paradox. A Cockney dame summed it up: 'It's all according to who. When nobody wears it, it becomes funny, see!'

And how right was James Laver writing on Fashion and the Dictators.

'... Dictatorships are inevitably hostile to the emancipation of women, and they tend to hold it up, or even to reverse the process on one condition—that they do not go to war. For war—that is modern, industrialized war—leads inevitably to female emancipation, just as, to speak in terms of fashion, it leads to simplification of woman's dress, to a uniformity of cut and colour.'

Katherine Busvine wrote a little piece:

'HOW TO LAUNCH A BATTLESHIP'  
'I have seen all this before,  
The great ship sliding to the sea,  
The pleased smile sliding on the face  
Of the lady in beige lace  
Who whacked the bottle.  
I am the lady in beige lace.'

And again,

'James Laver is growing graver.  
Keep your hair up for Aage Thaarup.'

But it was, I think, the drawings and the lay-out of the magazine in which we all took such pride. In the first issue we indulged in one or two trick pieces which later we had to dispense with. But they were very effective. For a Digby

*Ostrich plumes for H. M.  
Queen Elizabeth on the  
South African tour,  
1947*



*Another of the hats for  
the South African tour*



*Their Majesties King  
George VI and Queen  
Elizabeth at the wedding  
of H. R. H. Princess  
Elizabeth, 20 November  
1947*

*T.R.H. Princess  
Elizabeth and the Duke  
of Edinburgh starting  
on their honeymoon*



Morton advertisement there was a bold little jacket which opened like a folder and which had stuck on to it tiny revers of bright orange felt. An Elizabeth Arden page showed a line drawing of a broken pottery head. Holes were cut for the lips and the cheeks and behind them a revolving circle allowed different lipstick and rouge colours to show.

These things meant a great deal of painstaking hand work; and it was all done in my little Chelsea house. Sitting at the table or on the floor, we cut and we stuck, and I am afraid we swore. The quantities of gum, coffee and midnight oil consumed were quite fabulous.

The advertisers ranged widely from the Bath Festival Society to Peggy Sage, Walter Gilbey and Maison Prunier. The Bath Festival Society, pleading for a return to Bath's former role in Music, Drama, Art and Fashion, displayed a charming old picture, 'Comforts of Bath'. For Peggy Sage there was a delicious scraper-board drawing, of a soft feminine hand on a black background with a palette and brushes and the names of new nail-varnishes. It was so elegantly done. And Walter Gilbey gave his views on current fashions, with nothing cruder than his famous signature as the 'selling' line.

If only I could reproduce the Maison Prunier drawing! Sitting at a little table on the sea bottom are a deep-sea diver and the mermaid of sailors' dreams. A bottle of champagne stands in a bucket of ice; there are crustaceans and empty shells strewn around, little fishes peeping over the diver's shoulder. On the table are two cocktail glasses and some oysters; the diver, one hand round the mermaid's waist, proffers the menu with the other.

I think we really broke new ground in those different advertisements. And I still believe that more co-ordination in the style of the advertising matter and the style of the context can redound as beneficially to advertising revenue as to the credit of the editor.

It was late summer in 1939 when the fourth issue of *Pinpoints* appeared. I was just off for a holiday and glad to be



shedding my small editorial cares. It did not occur to me that it was for good.

Of all places, Budapest was my assignation that fateful July 1939. And how glad I am that chance and friendship should so have arranged it. Will Budapest ever again be the same as I found it that golden summer of a lost decade?

The holiday came about in almost as improbable a way as if it really had been Ruritania and myself a character in a stage piece. A friend telephoned me. Would I play chaperone for her and meet a very charming Hungarian with whom she was dining?

'The Ritz. Black tie,' she called down the telephone.

Now who could this be? Jean was a very old friend and I was interested to know. He turned out to be one, Janski, a young Hungarian with all the dark good looks of a hero and an excellent host. We dined and we talked, and enjoyed ourselves, and that evening I took them on a little tour of London. We travelled on the tops of trams and ended up with fish and chips in the Blackwall Tunnel.

By next afternoon's post came an envelope containing two return air tickets to Budapest. Some mistake, I thought. But no, for there was a card from Mr. Janski asking Jean and me to join him as his guests in Hungary. But, of course, I must refuse. Then I realized that, unless I went, Jean could not.

Then and there began a most astonishing holiday. It was like something from a film. No single item that a lavish producer could think of was missing. The chauffeured car to meet us at the airport. The mansion home, lovely garden and servants. A private suite for Jean and another for me. And a maid and a valet to boot.

The beauty of the Hungarian capital is legendary. On one side lies Buda, and on the other Pest, and bang in the middle the Danube; just as one had always dreamed of it. There were maidens in embroidered blouses with long plaits on their shoulders. There were violins, there was Tokay and paprika and a goulash quite unforgettable.

We drank the Tokay, we ate the goulash: we sat by the Danube. We walked by the Danube and we swam in the Danube. And at night we listened to those violins. It was idyllic.

But war clouds were coming up thick and fast, and through the chinks of the stage scenery one glimpsed strange, frightening things. One afternoon our host apologized for having to leave us for one evening as he had to attend a diplomatic dinner.

A few days later I decided that things looked very black and we made our adieux. As it turned out we were lucky to get a seat on one of the last overloaded planes back to Britain.

War was declared next day.

## CHAPTER IX

**N**EITHER flesh, fowl, nor good red herring! That was how I felt when a changed me came back to this changed world. The holiday had stolen my thoughts but hard facts had now to be faced.

I was cut off from my family and from my native land. By the new wartime regulations I must now observe a curfew. I must be in by ten every night. It was not so much early nights that mattered in a London in which there was so little to do. It was the compulsion, and the horror of being 'caught'.

Then the exodus from London changed the tenor of everything. First my work-girls began to leave, some to go into munition factories, others to learn Red Cross work. Customers thinned out, too. Many of them took their children into the country, some went to America; a lot of the young ones went into the Forces. Mayfair, like a wobbling top, was spinning slowly to a stop.

I felt a longing to be doing something to help. I tried to get in the Army, then the Air Force. But each time the same reply: not with that foot. In desperation I went to the police station.

'Couldn't I wash cups in some canteen!'

Everybody was most sympathetic, but as an alien there seemed nothing I could do.

In my little house in Chelsea I started organizing help for young Norwegians. Also, some work in a canteen turned up. And then, the first shock of hostilities over, there were a few hats to be made. With more to do I did not feel quite so restless.

The year 1939 snuffed out, and it was still the 'phoney' war. As yet the bombing had not started. When it did, there was a further exodus, a further thinning of clients and staff. I was now down to what I called two and a half girls. Two adults and one little girl.

As the bombing became more serious something had to be done about taking shelter whenever a raid warning was given. Rose Taylor, occupying Molyneux's old premises opposite me, had a shelter, so it was to this that we all trooped. Sometimes we made the journey half a dozen times a day, the crown of a hat in one hand, a brim in the other. Scaring though it all was, a macabre sort of humour seeped through. There was Rosa, the girl who could never find anything, but who nevertheless was determined not to be parted from her possessions. Perhaps she had washed out her one precious pair of nylons or changed her best blouse for an overall. To see her scrabbling about trying to find her things was like a pantomime piece. And as she crossed Grosvenor Street she might have been laying the trail in a paper chase.

In this piecemeal fashion we tried to do our work. But like most other people we found this constant upheaval so impractical that we preferred taking the risk and staying where we were.

Transport was one of the first of the wartime problems, and to solve this for myself I thought I would get a bicycle. Overnight, it seemed, bicycles had become rare, but at last I got one put together out of bits of scrap.

A kindly garage man round the corner fixed this thing from a pair of red wheels, a pale blue frame, ladies' handle-bars and a strange set of looping wire brakes. To look at, it was a startling hybrid. But the garage man was confident.

'It goes,' he said, much as his French counterpart might have shrugged it off with a 'Ça marche.'

It certainly went, but no sooner had I got it than another order was made . . . Horses must be tethered to lampposts when left unattended . . . no 'foreigner' might ride a bicycle without a permit.

The bicycle will always be associated in my mind with a journey that I made to Buckingham Palace. At this time I had the honour to be making hats for both the Duchess of Kent and the Duchess of Gloucester, as well as for Her Majesty the Queen, and it was on the same day that I had sat all morning on a hard bench at the Aliens' Office awaiting permission to ride this bicycle, that I went to Buckingham Palace.

The authorities had been very firm. I was a foreigner and as such there were certain things I must not do. Riding a bicycle was one of these things. The authorities con-  
doled with me—but these were the rules. Defeated, I went off to lunch and to keep my appointment at Buckingham Palace.

I had to have with me that afternoon five or six hat-boxes so I went along in a taxi. Arriving at the Palace I clambered out and made my way somewhat awkwardly, festooned as I was with hat-boxes, along the corridors. As I went, I passed the three butlers from the households of the Queen, the Duchess of Gloucester and the Duchess of Kent. They were quietly enjoying a cigarette.

'You know your way, Mr. Thaarup.'

I passed on, catching, as I went, a glimpse of the Crown Prince of Norway and of Queen Wilhelmina, who, since their countries were occupied, were staying at Buckingham Palace. The fittings over, I started on my way back down the long corridors. What a wonderful country, I reflected. Perhaps I was still smiling as I walked along. The Duchess of Kent came out of a side room.

'You seem amused, Mr. Thaarup.'

'Your Royal Highness . . .' And I told her the story of my not being allowed to ride a bicycle. 'But,' I added, 'nobody even looked in my hat-boxes.'

I did in the end get permission to ride my bicycle; simply by selling it to my own business. A director—that was me—could ride a bicycle!

Another hat which I made a little later had more grave associations. It was for Lady Coxen, the wife of Sir William

Coxen, the Lord Mayor of London. For Lady Coxen hats were a patriotic necessity but, as her daily programme became more and more arduous, she asked me if, instead of her coming to Grosvenor Street, I would fit them at the Mansion House. It was a morning in April 1940 that I went there.

So as to fit in with Lady Coxen's engagements I had started at a very early hour. When I got off the bus the city workers were still streaming along to their work, papers, lunch parcels and gasmasks in their hands. From the cavernous holes of the Underground they debouched in droves, to be eaten up by the yawning doors of the Royal Exchange and the Bank of England. I walked round the side of the Mansion House to the private entrance. A footman took my hat-box and showed me upstairs. Would I take breakfast? Lady Coxen was most gracious.

And then Sir William came in, his hand extended, sympathy on his face.

'I am so sorry about the news this morning,' he said.

My early appointment had meant my missing the radio and my newspapers.

'Sir William, what is it, please?'

Sir William kept hold of my hand for a moment, and then told me that the Germans had overrun Denmark during the night.

I looked from Sir William to Lady Coxen and then I am afraid that I forgot all about the hat. I made my excuses, dashed into the street and, with the crowd still hurrying by, stood in a doorway and shed an unashamed tear.

Back in my little house, the first heartbreak over, I reflected that I would now surely be allowed to do something. I could speak five languages, and somewhere this would be useful.

It was a customer who suggested that she might be able to arrange an interview at the Admiralty. With her help, this was done, and with a letter in my pocket I walked down Whitehall. As well as I was able, I ran up the steps of the Admiralty, past the policeman on duty, past the form-

filling desk and along the corridors. Nobody could have cherished keener hopes; I was already in navy blue.

'How d'y do? So it is you who makes those pretty hats for my daughter-in-law?' The High Naval Officer grinned.

Caution deserted me; it bowled down the corridors, bounced down the steps.

'Sir, that's not playing the game. I came here to see if I could possibly help. I speak five languages . . . surely to goodness. . .'

'Well, well, we'll see.' The H.N.O. touched a bell and instructed his aide to have my knowledge of languages checked. When this was over I went away with hopes even higher than when I arrived. But again I was refused, and for the same reason, my lame foot. When I pressed for reasons I learned that it was thought that in a strong wind or a storm I might not be able to keep my footing and might sustain an injury which would entitle me to a pension. I wrote off immediately offering to forgo any such claims. A wooden leg and a black patch over the eye were traditional at sea, I added. But it was no good, once again nothing doing!

It was a fireman's blue overall in which I finally found myself. My boyish ambitions had included all the usual roles of engine driver, deep-sea diver, policeman, soldier and sailor, but never that of a fireman!

And though from an artist's point of view the war seemed all so tragically wasteful, and at times frightening enough, I can recall some good moments in my fireman's uniform. The bombs brought me friendship as well as danger, as they did to many others. In particular, I recall the Danish lady who called on me one night. Her Danish passport put her in the same predicament as myself, but she, too, was longing to help. There were also two Swedish girls, Lena Wickman, the daughter of an editor of one of Sweden's newspapers, and Agneta Prytz, the daughter of the Swedish Minister in London. As good neutrals, these ladies could all have been exempt, but in fact they needed no persuasion to get them into slacks and up the fireman's ladder.

We all became good friends, sharing the work and the fun. Together watching the stars set and the dawn rise in blacked-out London whilst on patrol. And I can recall that it was not unknown to share a little 'diplomatic' food as well. For on some Sundays Agneta's father would invite us to the Embassy in Portland Place. The house was a very lovely one, and contained a fine collection of paintings and books. To spend an hour or so there, in those days of shut galleries, was a real feast for the mind.

But in the evening, when the servants had gone to the cinema, it was another sort of feast we enjoyed. Down in the kitchen, our sleeves rolled up, appetites whetted by the sight of food already half-forgotten, we cooked and enjoyed more than one meal.

It was a strange life. Fire-watching and washing-up in Chelsea; in Grosvenor Street trying to believe that hats were important. This was before the idea of 'morale boosting' was conceived, and in common with everyone else I was feeling very blue.

The policy of keeping things going was being advocated on the one hand, on the other every day there were new restrictions. A pinprick which all traders suffered about this time, and which caught me out, was an order that nothing other than perishable food should be wrapped in paper.

Peddalling to Grosvenor Street one morning to keep an appointment with a wealthy American lady who had ordered a mink hat, I stopped to buy a newspaper. The lady had come to me wearing a mink coat which she wanted matched with the hat. Now there is mink and mink. This was mink of the very finest quality and I had taken great pains to match it. The lady was sailing that day for America, and was to pick up the hat at ten o'clock. Arriving at my show-rooms a little before ten I opened the paper to read the headlines. And there was the order about using no paper bags.

My client knew nothing of this and would perhaps not have realized its immediate effect anyway. But it was a



rather funny situation. The bill was for something like sixty-five pounds, and this I presented in the usual glossy envelope. The hat I wrapped in my newspaper!

'Well, if that isn't cute,' was all the lady said.

But I could visualize the nice tale it would make across the Atlantic.

As the war lengthened the struggle to keep going got harder. It had been suggested to me that I should try making hats for the stores. I did not think I could make hats at a low enough price for this. And I believed, too, that my hats would be too individual for this market. But why not see? Why not try?

I worked at it and produced eighteen hats that my girls could make at a price that would allow of their re-sale in the stores. But would they appeal?

I packed the hats, gave them to the young lady who was to take them round and wished her the best of luck. This venture would not be very lucrative for me but it could keep my girls employed and my doors open. Dimly I saw, too, that if it were successful, the idea could be expanded. I kept my fingers crossed.

Late that afternoon the young lady came back glowing with success. She had taken some quite nice orders. My workrooms would now be busy. I turned the idea over in my mind. In a small way I was now in the wholesale trade.

At this period the Government was asking traders to concentrate their premises wherever possible in order to economize on light and fuel. With only two and a half girls in my workroom my Grosvenor Street premises were a bit of a white elephant, so I was glad to avail myself of an invitation to go over to my old friend, Digby Morton.

But it was also the expressed wish of the Queen that the couture houses should endeavour to keep their businesses going so that unemployment should not be increased and so that a nucleus of the fashion trade might be preserved. Most of our clients were scattered all over the country, and this presented a poser.

Well, if Mahomet would not come to the mountain, then the mountain would go to Mahomet. And so the idea of a travelling fashion show came to life again; only this time it was to be a composite affair.

There were four firms taking part in this first big war-time fashion show: Digby Morton, Louis Woolf the furrier, the firm of Elizabeth Arden and myself. With a diminished staff it was hard work getting ready but it was good to feel a bit of the old enthusiasm. And I must say, a brief few days out of London just then was not without its charm!

The time was November; the days foggy and bleak, and dark at four. There were black-out restrictions and there were transport difficulties, but somehow we made it. Four mannequins, ten hat-boxes, six large dress baskets and four thousand pounds' worth of furs left Paddington Station one afternoon for Bristol, and the next day after a six-hour rehearsal we put on a show at three o'clock.

Financially it did not pay, but the prestige was enormous. All the newspapers reported it and *Picture Post* described it in words and pictures. Certainly it brought a touch of colour to a grey day but, more important still, it shook off some of the 'ennui' and 'blues'.

This first show at Bristol proved something to me. On this occasion Elizabeth Arden had made a new lipstick called 'Peony', and I had collaborated by using black velvet and peony-coloured velvet for many of my hats, with peony flowers and peony-coloured ribbon. It was successful and we continued with the idea. Whenever there was a special 'Arden' week, whether in a London store or in a provincial one, I showed my hats too.

Later on I was to extend this idea of collaboration to hair-dressing. I had several times discussed this with Mr. Steiner, the Mayfair hairdresser, but it was not until after the war that the opportunity presented itself. We were asked by the B.B.C. to do a joint television programme. Naturally enough, Mr. Steiner had a bias in favour of the hat design coming second to the hair, and I had some views on

adapting hair to hat. We had some fun sorting this out. There was a bit of fun at the studio too.

The setting for my part of the programme was designed to look like a hat shop. It wanted a bit more 'atmosphere' so I distributed one or two of my hat-boxes, which of course had AAGE THAARUP writ large across them. Between rehearsals I went to find the hat-boxes turned front to back. I put them right again, but after going off to be 'made up' for the actual televising, found the boxes again turned back to front.

Someone had translated the showing of my name as an infringement of the B.B.C. rule that there must be no advertising! But since I was being announced as Mr. Thaarup, and since not only my business but my own name was 'Thaarup', I decided I could be naughty. While Mr. Steiner busily arranged curls, I arranged my boxes.

Following the Bristol show, I became obsessed with an idea. I was sure that Britain with her allies would be victorious in the field, but it seemed to me very necessary that something should be done to ensure that her fashion trade would also be triumphant. I formulated a scheme for British fashions to cover the world the moment victory had been won. Using two fingers, I laboriously hammered this out on my typewriter.

It seemed most propitious when Lady Weir came to see me about a hat, for I knew that her husband was the President of the Board of Trade. I broached the subject to her, and she agreed that it would be a good idea for me to see her husband officially.

There are moments in one's life which never fade but which stand out with the exaggerated sharpness of something seen through a child's 3-D-scope. Generally, these are moments of ecstasy. I can recall the first time I stood in a really snow-covered land. Nothing but scintillating shapes until the horizon met the blue sky. Another occasion which I can vividly remember is lying in long grass deep in the country where silence was real enough to allow one to hear the insects. Time stood still.

But this was another sort of unforgettable experience. Rather chilling, but just as clear-cut, and as permanently indexed in my mind.

Armed with my scheme, I took a bus down Whitehall to the Board of Trade. Sir Cecil was on the second floor and as I came up in the lift I could see rows and rows of steel cabinets. They seemed to stretch illimitably down those long corridors in that vast building. And they were dusty, dusty, dusty.

One could just read the labels: 'Treaty with South Africa, 1912'; 'Treaty on Haberdashery with West Africa, 1895'; 'Suggestion for Treaty with Pacific Island, 1876'. It seemed a tomb of ideas, a mausoleum of past schemes.

The dust is in my nostrils now. I can visualize the labour, the aspiration, the memorials to lost causes down the years enshrined in those cabinets.

I put my idea before Sir Cecil. It was a good idea, I thought, and Sir Cecil agreed. We talked enthusiastically whilst the sun shone through his window. But when I came out of his room and again passed through those long corridors with their endless steel cabinets ranged down the side, I felt I was in one of the Pyramids, and that the fate of my scheme was certain. I almost ran from those cold, silent, steel cabinets.

The Bristol adventure had given me the 'feel' of showing in the provinces, and with the idea of further developing my excursion into the wholesale trade I planned some more provincial trips. I could in this way also hope to keep in touch with some of my old customers who had left London *pro tem*.

The first place I planned to visit was Glasgow. So I set about making a collection. That done, I set out one dark cold night, with two models, for Euston. In those days trains were full to the brim. Long khaki- and blue-clad legs stretched themselves across every compartment and down the corridors; though there were no sleeping compartments there was a multitude of sleepers.

One of my models was young, the other was my dear Cleopatra lady. Everybody slept as well as they could sitting up, but at dawn a broad Scots voice interrupted my efforts to court the arms of Morpheus.

'Ye'll be crossing the Border,' it said.

It was my first visit to Scotland and I was immediately wide awake. Looking out of the window, there, sure enough, was the heather. Heather and more heather covering the dales in a glorious mist of muted colour. It was beautiful and it assuaged some of my fears.

For I was a bit worried. I was 'showing' at a wonderful, old-established firm, Daly's, but I had never before visited Scotland; I did not know how the Scottish ladies would react to my hats. I have learned since that I was not the only one worried. Daly's had provided an alternative show in case mine was a failure.

The show was for three o'clock in the afternoon and, as always, there was plenty to do beforehand: the stage to arrange, the pianist to brief, and so on. These things did not leave me time to worry, but the moment came when the audience were assembled. I peeped through the curtain. The salon was full. Row after row of handsome women, blue-eyed and bonny looking. They reminded me of the women of my own country. But what was it . . . a sort of guarded look. Almost suspicious.

'Heavens,' I muttered.

Something had to be done to win them over. I had been warned, of course. These ladies did not want flighty bits of nonsense. They wanted hats with style, but good-looking hats. And of course they wanted rather bigger head fittings.

I was prepared for this, but I had included in my collection one hat that was rather saucy. A tiny pill-box with glamorous side drapery to wind over the shoulder. I had planned to show this half-way through the programme. But now I scrapped that plan. I told my young model to put this hat on as the first number and, stepping in front of the curtains, I bowed.

'Ladies,' I said, 'I thought it would be nice to start with a naughty hat. Here it is.'

The curtains parted, the hat came on and a sea of faces registered one single thought.

'Humbug!'

It was a ghastly moment, but I continued compèring.

'I have also brought with me a lady who, I know, will not mind me describing her as not-so-young, who will show hats that may please some of my audience.'

And then my second model came on looking distinguished and charming, and having all the things that my audience wanted—including the large head fittings.

Such a clap followed. Like magic the temperature rose, eyes warmed, faces lost their critical look. As the show continued the enthusiasm grew. Half-way through, by now in a fever of excitement, I rushed to the back of the stage.

'White heather! Get me some white heather.'

We did not have bagpipes, and strictly neither I nor my models knew how to dance a reel, but when at the end of the show the white heather was brought on to the stage and with a bit of green tulle I conjured from it a last little hat, we did our best with the dance. And that nearly took the roof off. The audience clapped and clapped and laughed and clapped again.

I did a lot of business that day, but what touched me greatly were the number of kind messages I received. And next morning there were little gifts of shortbread, and an invitation to come and eat haggis! It was a truly wonderful first meeting with Scotland.

And so I went round the country and across the Border to grimy industrial towns and to fashionable county towns. And I made a different collection for each town. Once I took hats all looking like rather delicious pieces from a French *pâtisserie*. They had trimmings of glazed cherries and grapes and swathes of creamy tulle or peppermint-green chiffon. For another it might seem that I had raided the poulterers for the many-hued feathers and quills that made a different sort of appeal.

For in every town taste was different. Sometimes heads were different, too. Purses certainly were. It was the day of fabulous munition factory wages. In Newcastle upon Tyne the manager of one store told me that it was an everyday thing for his millinery department to sell a hat for twenty-five guineas. But in the quiet square of an east-coast town a 'new poor' looked askance at the rising cost of a hat.

Though tastes, heads and purses might all be different, the ladies were all looking for a bit of magic. It might be to dramatize something in their looks, it might be something in their lives. But when out of my boxes I was able to produce the appropriate bit of magic, no conjurer could have been more satisfied.

One of the reasons for the higher cost of hats which so staggered the 'new poor' who are a by-product of every war was the Purchase Tax. How I suffered, too; that maze of figures kept me out of bed many a night.

Then came another shock, clothes rationing. The scheme meant that the amount of material which I could purchase tax-free was based on the amount I could prove once before to have bought . . . was it since the Boer War? My hats were really taxed twice over, once for the material and once for the 'hat'. So they became even dearer; but since no prized clothing coupons were required for them customers still thought it money well spent.

Presently began the era of shortages. Shortages of hoods, of straws, of silks and velvets, of ribbons and trimmings of all sorts. This was a real headache for me.

One day I was tackled by a pressing young 'lady of the Press' as to what I was now going to use for trimmings. Dizzily and with no very clear idea of how I was to continue, I started as brightly as I could . . .

'Well, we have certainly got plenty of red tape . . .'

Without waiting for me to go on her pencil was busy scribbling: Mr. Thaarup's new hats . . . red tape trimmings.

I could see that it would make a story and perhaps I really could do something with red tape. I could not now

back out of it anyway, so I hurried to the stationers round the corner.

'Could I have some red tape, please?'

What a delicious surprise! My travels to this date had been quite diverse. I had spent two years in a British Dominion, I had been in many different parts of Britain. I had even been in Government offices. But I was still quite unprepared to find that real red tape is in fact pink in colour. I could not get back to my workroom fast enough. And I took enough 'red' tape to tie up my trimming problems for that month. Pictures of hats with pink tape cockades and little pink-edged veils appeared in all the newspapers.

But we were only at the beginning of the shortages; things got much worse. There were no feathers, no flowers, no ornaments. Hats began to look very severe.

And then a lovely experience came my way. Lovely, though a little sad. Passing through Knightsbridge one day, I stopped in front of that fine old house of Woolland Brothers. It was before it became the smart modern store it now is, and it had then an atmosphere uniquely evocative of the past.

Despite the gloom inside, everything looked cared for. The hefty oak and mahogany counters shone, the brass glittered. The carpets were brushed, the bundles of merchandise neat in their special shelves.

But if you stopped to consider it, everything was old, old in a rather moving way. The old layout suggested a less hurrying epoch; the old-fashioned shape of the fittings and the genteel display of the goods. Even the staff, charming, but certainly grey-haired if not white-haired, and a little slow.

I knew that Queen Alexandra had been used to getting her hats from Woolland Brothers, and that in Edwardian times this house had contained a very fine millinery department—and an expensive one, but then those were the days of vast hats each with an immense amount of work in it. And expensive trimmings had been used, ostrich feathers particularly.

I went in and found the ribbon department. There behind



the counter was a lovely lady. She had silver hair brushed up and *pince-nez*, real *pince-nez* hanging from a ribbon.

There was an old gentleman too, the lady's counterpart in old-time charm and civility. He showed me some of their beautiful hand-embroidered ribbons from long ago. And, what is more, he told me that down in the basement there were trunks full of old stuff. Stocks of all those wonderful trimmings of long ago. Downstairs we went. Wonderful things were there. *Passementerie*, beautiful ribbons, elaborate buttons, lovely hatpins; some of the hatpins long and sharp enough to fight a duel with. There were feathers, and feather boas with gorgeous tassels, reminding one of the hobble skirts of 1910, hand-painted china beads and wonderful little silver things. None of them was in sufficient quantity to make a 'line', and I was able to buy them all for a song.

What treasures they were! They helped to make many a hat pretty, and I like to think that they played a little part in keeping some ladies cheerful in those dark days. For me there was just a touch of sadness in dissipating these mementoes, for I am old enough to feel a nostalgia for these symbols of other and more spacious days.

From a friend in the theatrical world, I was introduced to another source of hat trimmings. Without this introduction I would surely never have known the little shop in Soho.

The shop is unremarkable from the outside. But inside is the remarkable Madame ——. She sits on a high stool—almost permanently—behind a little desk in the front of the shop. On the desk is a little brass scale, the one bright thing in that rather dingy place.

From the ceiling to the floor the whole shop is lined with boxes, not all matching but somehow jumbled in to create a feeling of coherence. On the outside of a great many of the boxes is a little bit of trimming to indicate what is inside. A tassel, a button or a bit of gilt ribbon.

But some of the boxes are stacked very high, and some look as though they have not been investigated for a very long time. You wonder if there is really anything in them.

But ask Madame for some little trifle, a piece of gilt fringe or some velvet bobbles and, lured from behind her desk, she will mount a small ladder with a sureness of purpose that lays your doubts. The cloud of dust which descends as some special box is levered out nearly obliterates even the ample proportions of Madame.

Perhaps you ask for something a bit difficult, some red tassels with gold braid. Madame speaks with an accent, and shows evidence of a very wonderful memory.

'Yes, yes, my boy. Yes, I have them; you wait, I see. *There she is.*'

To save dislodging Madame from her perch, you stretch up to where she points, then choke your way out of the dust. But sure enough when you open the box there *are* the red tassels *and* with gold braid.

Now comes the particular prescription of this shop. Whether your purchase is of beads or buttons, ribbon or rings, it is weighed in the scale. Yes, weighed! What most people would call 'yard' goods, or buttons which are usually sold by the dozen, all have to be submitted to the same test of their value. They have to be weighed.

Then by some unknown unfathomable ritual Madame — works out a price. You bargain with her and in the end agree to some price about a quarter of what she first asks. You go away enraptured by your purchase, overjoyed with the success of your bargaining. The only drawback is that you have spent half a day there. But after all, there are worse ways of spending half a day.

I could not always get to Madame's shop, and as other sources became exhausted, I finally turned to the junk shops of Chelsea.

What incredible finds I made. An overmantel with a lovely yellow fringe; cleaned up, the fringe was good for half a dozen hats. Bits of velvet and tinsel, a cushion and an antimacassar; they all helped. Perhaps I found some Chinese embroidery, a few paste and steel buckles. Such were the discarded riches from which I tried to reconstruct a moment of beauty.

## CHAPTER X

**A**HAT in a bottle. To be administered once a day.  
The doctor's orders!

The 'phone tinkled in the room of my north-country hotel. A man's voice came over the line.

'Mr. Thaarup? How d'you do. Do you remember an old customer of yours in Town, Mrs. K.?'

Mrs. K. The lady who never wore a hat in a dull way. Of course I remembered her. I remembered her uncanny flair for always choosing exactly the right hat for herself. She was not especially good-looking but her style and dress gave the impression that she was.

Now, my caller told me, she was lying in hospital recovering from injuries received during a bombing raid. Plastic surgery had partly restored her looks, but her spirits were still very low. Something had to be done to cheer her up. Mr. K.'s idea was that I should make a couple of hats that he could take along to his wife's sick room. They might do the trick of restoring her morale.

When I got back to London I turned up the lady's head measurements and sat down to think out two hats. One should be a little straw trimmed with soft green leaves and white lilac with a tiny bit of green veiling. The other, a little grey 'sailor' with a cloud of pale grey chiffon caught up with tiny cerise bows. They should be real '*chapeaux*'.

I made the hats, then, for once defying regulations, packed them in a nice hat-box and tissue paper and enclosed a little note.

A week later I received from the husband a grateful letter. The cure had worked! Mrs. K. had been tempted by the box, looked inside and fallen for the hats at once. She asked

for a mirror and, with a cushion at her back, tried them on. From that day she started to recover.

I could multiply that tale by twelve and each tale would represent some aim successfully achieved with a hat. There have been hats that helped husbands win elections and hats that triumphantly opened bazaars. There have been hats that victoriously 'downed' some rival.

If there have been a hundred different objectives there have certainly been a thousand different ways of doing battle. It was for the lady to choose the tactics and for me to devise the 'weapon'. The hat may register sweet temperateness or splendid abandon, unassailable correctness or uninhibited drama. The gamut of emotions that can be portrayed by a hat is unrecorded.

But in all these things how often was not the secret purpose the age-old one of finding a mate! A hat makes a fine first blandishment, a signal of interest.

Most dressy women know something of the cunning of a hat. And something of the colours and shapes and sort of hat that will become them. If only they had a little more faith either in themselves or in their milliners. I am sorry to let the cat out of the bag, but the fatal mistake that many women make when buying a hat is to take with them a friend. Experience has proved to me that the 'friend' generally recommends the wrong hat, and in this respect is more of an enemy than a friend.

The war took away some of my old clients, but it also brought me many new ones. It was when I was giving a hat show at Harrogate that I first met that wonderfully interesting woman, Mrs. Doris Langley Moore. And with what pleasure I remember that first meeting, and seeing the beginning of that collection of period fashion which later was to become world-famous.

I had given the show at the hotel where I was staying. It was a good hotel, but like all the others at this time hard up for food, staff and fuel. The show had been successful, but when all the excitement and stimulation was over some doubts and misgivings began to creep in. How long would

it really take my girls to make the blue quilted taffeta number? And *how* was I to dissuade the florid lady from having the green hat?

I felt a hundred years old, no, a hundred and twenty! If only I could float away some of these cares in a good hot bath. Then even baked beans on toast would not seem quite so disillusioning.

What a blessing is the telephone! It rang and a woman's friendly voice said that she and her husband would be delighted if I would care to dine and stay at their house. She had enjoyed the show so much, Mrs. Langley Moore went on, and she knew about the hotel shortages. What a wonderful adventure awaited me! The Langley Moores' house was large, comfortable and full to the brim with interesting things. Even my room had enough of interest to keep me up after I had said good night. Strange Moorish figures, old prints, ostrich plumes and all sorts of things.

But it was next morning and in the top storey of the house that the adventure became really exciting. Here was a floor given over entirely to what Mrs. Langley Moore then described as some of the 'old clothes', but which in fact was the nucleus of a very valuable collection.

What had given her this idea? And at an age when most young married women are still un-serious. Already one could see how important these things might be one day. There they were, a representative assortment of coats, suits and frocks; evening dresses, blouses, underclothes and hats; each one ticketed with the date, the price and the place of purchase. London, Paris, Vienna, Rome.

It was like a walk through the past, and more fascinating than any photograph album, for one filled in the background for oneself. In these different garments one could trace the change of taste as well as of fashion. There was evidence, too, of a change in standards of workmanship. One could picture not only the wearer but recall the times in which they were worn. And one could visualize the girls and the women who painstakingly had made the clothes; and put into them something of their lives too.

I lingered over the hats, just remembering the youthful ones which were as lush with trimming as were the adult ones of that period. Then on through the cloche era to the Edwardian revival and the doll's hat period and then to the high-crowned hats that were being worn at that time.

As the historians record the passage of kings, and the course of wars, it seemed that, in a different way, Mrs. Langley Moore was also recording history of a gentler kind.

Time has since shown the value of those early, inspired beginnings. From a small personal collection it has now grown to be a much more ambitious and extensive affair. When, after the war, in order to raise funds to establish a real Museum of Costume, Mrs. Langley Moore put on a show at the New Theatre, it gave me very great pleasure to be able to interest Her Majesty the Queen, with the result that the Queen graciously consented to be the guest of honour. And still later, when a generous peer gave a wing of his home for housing the collection, the now Queen Mother again gave her patronage.

I worked hard on these wartime trips to the provinces, and though not all of them ended as interestingly as my visit to Harrogate, I enjoyed them and the new life and people I found outside the London orbit.

In the fashion world hats had become a symbol of freedom from the demands of war. They were coupon free, and could still show some evidence of fashion. In other things the damping-down process had produced a sad uniformity of line. So everywhere I went I met with excitement and enthusiasm. Hats were a kind of outlet for pent-up longings for individuality.

And in my little house in Chelsea I was also having a quite exciting time. Early in the war, I had made a resolve. Till peace came, and as long as my house stood, it should be open house.

It was in the very early days of the war that I made my resolve. The days when the little fishing smacks and small mercantile vessels of the Scandinavian countries were

being swept off the seas, running for British ports. Many young men had found refuge in Great Britain, and some of them, after being passed through a control camp, had been able to join British boats, or enlist in one of the Services. With a fellow feeling for these lads cut off from their home country, I had given a bed and a few meals to some.

But later the problem of their leave came up. Like any other young men, no sooner was their boat in port, or their squadron off duty, than they made for London. It might be midday, it might be midnight when they arrived. But they were almost sure to be tired and certain to be hungry. I could surely help.

And so my little house was never shut. Perhaps on the wettest days or when the wind blew fiercely the actual door was closed, but the key could be found easily enough under a fire bucket which stood in my postage-stamp front garden. It was nothing unusual for me to come home and find any number, from two to half a dozen, of young men in uniform making themselves at home.

The word got round amongst the neighbours. These were mostly young married couples or widowed mothers with sons at the war and, in spite of their own cares of young children or of war work, there were always offers of help.

'Any socks to mend? Please put through letter-box of No. 11.'

'Call round for laundry tomorrow night.'

Those neighbours were certainly good. They offered not only help but friendship to these boys. And if in return, when the bombs were falling and I was on fire duty, there suddenly materialized more than a handful of able helpers all speaking some Scandinavian language, it was not surprising.

My open door was rather a success all round. But getting the food to feed these young visitors was not so simple. They had their ration cards, but since their comings were generally unannounced I never was quite prepared.

But again the neighbours helped. Returning from business I might find sitting on my mat a sponge cake or a tart or a

saucepan of stew; a sure indication that inside the house I should find one or more figures stretched out in the arm-chairs.

Now that shops are full of food it is only possible dimly to recall those days of deprivation, and the new interest one took in food. Suddenly food was a *topic*. Whether one lunched at the Ritz or queued at the fishmongers', there was always some exchange of information about where some item of food could be had. Or even drink!

'Old so-and-so's bar is still quite good. Can't think where he gets it.' Or: 'Why don't they *say* there's only cod? I'd have gone down the road. They've got oranges.'

And one reminisced about food. One related recipes for real food, one swapped preferences. A favourite pastime was to describe in minutest detail, with suitable gustatory enjoyment, a favourite pre-war dish. I am not a big eater, and it was the little things I missed most. The taste of onion and the aroma of imported spices. The mention of a lemon would almost bring tears to my eyes. Certainly my mouth would weep for my eyes.

A real down-to-earth problem was how to be prepared with something that could quickly be made into a snack. As though it had been waiting for the occasion along came the solution. Spam. Wonderful, wonderful Spam. If I had had the opportunity I would have bowed to the American who first marketed this.

My neighbours knew forty-six ways of serving Spam, and I could double the number; my inventiveness knew no bounds. Perhaps in consequence my hats were a little more dull, but I certainly excelled myself with this Spam. And what, after all, was wrong with serving it straight from the tin on to a lettuce leaf? Nothing.

And then, miracle upon miracle, another genius devised potato powder. And powdered egg. It is perhaps an indiscretion to confess to the culinary magic I found in these two things. But they reminded me of my childhood and the tiny envelopes I bought then. They came from Japan, and were preposterously flat and unpromising compared



with the lavish picture of flowers and trees printed on one side of the paper. But pop the dry contents into water and magically a world of chrysanthemums bloomed. To me, the easy magic of the powdered egg and the powdered potato was just as marvellous and a good deal more sustaining.

If all my experiments in cooking were not successful there was always Susie. Strictly, Susie's introduction belongs to the last year before the war, when I was furnishing my house. At the end of the little cul-de-sac in which my house stood was an office of the Dumb Friends' League. To and from this office came all sorts. Happy people and sad people. Some bringing an animal and some taking one away.

In that strangely fortuitous way in which these things turn out, I had one morning saluted a tiny old lady nursing a minute bundle of fur. Just some crumpled-up white whiskers, and two green eyes, in a small warm ball. I think the old lady's eyes were almost as appealing as the kitten's were innocent. She wanted to find the kitten a home: I took the little ball of fur.

So Susie was there, and like humans her diet had with the war become a little strange. Some Spam that went 'off' never came amiss with her.

Towards the end of the war I moved from Digby Morton's, taking a showroom on the second floor of Busvine's place in Brook Street. One did not know that the end was near, but so many people had drifted back that there was more business to be done in London. It was surprising really because this was the time of the V-2 rockets. Perhaps their unheralded approach and the sheer impossibility of individual defence against them had developed a fatalistic outlook. They were back, and now I needed a business place of my own.

It seemed a bit like my early days in London: a showroom to decorate and an office to furnish. I was not as hard-up as then but there were other difficulties. The premises were bomb-scarred, it was impossible to get builders or decorators. In any case there were restrictions on the amount of money that might be spent, even on necessary repairs.

But the place was beautiful. I was thrilled and sure that I could do something with it. It felt so good once again to be in possession of my own premises, and prinking out my wares.

The little office was easy. I covered a gap in the wall with some stout board and myself painted it to resemble a doll-size window. I added a tiny window-box and hung a brass Victorian flower basket over the electric light. The whole room was in candy pink and white.

Corrugated paper painted over and separated into panels by strips of braid made the corridor. The big Regency room with its bow-fronted window I decorated in Chartreuse green and wine colours. It was a wonderfully gracious room. But enhancing its lovely proportions and giving it real elegance was a magnificent crystal chandelier.

But still there were V-2 rockets falling. I went to the theatre one night and noticed that all the chandeliers were carefully tied up in dust sheets so that should any of the glass be shattered by nearby explosions no one underneath would suffer cuts or other injury.

Back in my new Brook Street premises I had just completed the decorations and found a very real delight in coming to work every morning and seeing the Regency room with the sun making lovely rainbows in the crystals of the chandelier. Walking down Bond Street I pondered the advisability of copying the theatre's precautions, of dust-sheeting my chandelier and wrapping away my pleasure. I must make up my mind. At that moment a strong voice from a nearby auctioneer's impinged on my hearing. Absorbed in weighing the pros and cons of my riddle I absent-mindedly wandered inside, watched his hammer and listened to his patter for a few minutes. According to this persuasive gentleman everything was going for a song. I could not help but be interested; but presently when six brandy glasses were brought forward by the stolid aide in the green baize apron, my thoughts woke up.

Six huge balloon glasses—as thin as paper, catching the rainbows as glibly as my chandelier. I bought the glasses

for the required 'song' and I took back with me not only a parcel of glass, but a mind firmly made up. My beautiful chandelier and my beautiful *ballon* glasses should be sported openly—a challenge to those V-2s.

One of the first customers I was able to welcome in my new showroom was an old and much loved one, Lady Mount Temple, 'Mollic' to her friends. Her immense chic and her never-flagging interest in pretty and womanly things were a real tonic. Almost equally she hated masculine-looking women and dull clothes.

'I need a new hat,' she said. 'I suppose it must be something plain and simple. Just a few cerise velvet roses and a bit of black satin. . .'

I could have hugged her!

A great many of the customers who came to me at this time wanted a hat in a hurry. Without warning they would come dashing in, asking me to make them a hat by Wednesday. Something frightfully gay and pretty. And, with a sidelong look in the mirror, 'flattering'.

One lady would tell me that 'Charles' was getting five days' leave; another would explain that 'Bill' was on a course and she was going 'up north' to stay with him. Or, bravely, happily: 'I'm meeting *all* my sons for lunch.'

Some of these ladies had changed a little; their hands were not so smooth. They wore rather heavier gloves and country shoes. And they told tales about their young children; how 'John' was in charge of the boiler and 'Ann' helped with the garden and 'Cherry' did the washing-up. Their maids and cooks and odd-job men had vanished into the melting pot of war.

There were, of course, some younger ladies who came to see me. They preened themselves critically in the mirror with quick little tosses of their long hair. Their eyes would light up when I found the right hat for them, but round their young lips was a determined look and sometimes even a little sigh would escape. How many gloomy registry offices my hats saw, I never knew. Or, with less orthodoxy, how many strange hotels in out-of-the-way places.

I was just completing a fitting one morning when I heard a man's tread in my salon. I turned to find Sir W., for whose wife I had made many, many hats.

Now in my experience it is rare to find an Englishman who is sufficiently interested in women's clothes to accompany his wife to her milliner. But Sir W. was an exception. He was himself tall, good-looking and most elegantly turned out. He had more than once come to see me with his wife; not that she was not eminently able to make a quite admirable choice for herself. She was an exciting, exotic little thing and she knew very well how to display and enhance her charms. It was simply that Sir W. was interested—in the same way that he took an interest in anything his wife wore. He liked her to create a bit of a stir when they entered a room together, went to the theatre, or boarded a 'plane. He was that type.

'Hullo, Thaarup! How are you? Hasn't my wife come yet?'

'No,' I said, 'she is not here. Won't you sit down?'

I made Sir W. comfortable, offered him a cigarette and inquired after his wife, whom I had not seen for some months.

I finished the fitting on which I had been engaged, showed the lady out and at the same moment greeted another who was coming up the stairs. She was somebody I did not know.

'What can I do for you, Madam?' I bowed.

'My husband is here, isn't he? Oh, there you are, Willie.'

Sir W. came to my rescue.

'You made such lovely hats for Y., I want you to make some for . . . Will you, please?'

But there was more embarrassment to come. The hats for wife number two were duly completed and in the ordinary course, the docket which goes with the hat right through the workroom to the final packing, bore the name of Lady W. Quite naturally, since the name was a familiar one on our books, the account was sent to the usual address,

only to be coldly returned. Wife number one was still living there. I made the best apologies possible and sent the bill to another address. The cheque was still from the same bank!

Something new in hats was coming along. I christened it the 'Six o'clock' hat. This may suggest the glittering little thing we now call the cocktail hat. But strictly it had more in common with an earlier fashion, that of the 'Five o'clock' hat.

The 'Five o'clock' hats! How the name stirs memories. It brings to my mind more than one period; evokes sharp pictures of more than one setting. Silently it comments on an immense change of outlook, yet through four decades there was still one common association. Tea was drunk at five o'clock.

My first introduction to the 'Five o'clock' hat was in my boyhood, and I can still recollect vividly the impression of elegance it made. Perhaps in those days tea drinking was a less casual and less frequent thing. I am sure the five o'clock hour was most important and if it were, also, the occasion of a social call, the hat was important, too.

The hat that I remember was worn by a lady taking tea with my mother. She wore a lovely blouse trimmed with what I now suppose was Brussels lace. There were little velvet bows, too, and tiny covered buttons and a long dangling gold chain. The lady had a great deal of hair piled high on her head, and on top of this, a big delicious hat.

I had at that time no real interest in hats. But this one was such a varied thing, bits of tulle and bits of velvet, and not one but several really beautiful birds. And finally, a huge hatpin with a big china knob on which was painted a rose.

It was an edifice! And it was balanced with the same nicety as the lady balanced her saucer in one hand, the other delicately holding the porcelain cup from which she sipped tea. I know now that the hat would have had under the brim several rows of ruched silk taffeta, to perch it

high, and to provide some anchorage. But in those days, ignorant of this, to me it was a marvel, apparently floating on the air.

The memory of that 'tea hat' fades into a later memory. I was in Berlin; the year was 1926 and the post-war tea-dancing rage was at its height. The bright young things of Europe were Charleston—Charleston—Charleston mad. In Berlin it was 'Funf Uhr Thé', in Paris, 'Le Five o'clock', and in London, oddly enough, 'Thé Dansant'.

Every town and almost every hotel had its 'Five o'clock'. The dance floor might be only two feet by four, and the dancers glued cheek to cheek, or it might be as big as a barn and the dancing more like skating. But always the chic woman wore a tea hat.

Tea was the fashionable thing even if you did not dance. In Paris you went to Recamier's just behind the Rue de Rivoli, or perhaps the Meurice with its wonderful painted ceilings. That was if you were smart or rich. But you could get tea anywhere. One hotelier, I remember, in an excess of enthusiasm, displayed a sign: 'Five o'clock Tea à toutes heures'!

There was, of course, dear old W. H. Smith's on the corner of the Rue Cambon. There, on the second floor, in the Tudor Room, you could get a really English cup of tea. You might find here a handful of French, but for the most part the ladies were English. It was my first introduction to the *matron* and her special type of hat.

There were schoolma'ams who looked as though they had come straight from touring the Louvre. The Winged Victory, Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo could be quietly discussed over crumpets and orange marmalade. Perhaps their hats were a little like tea cosies, but round the corner by Patou's there was a chic little place where there was not only dancing but a cabaret too. And there the hats were as gay and pretty, and as naughty as the soubrettes. And probably designed by Patou.

In any event, these hats were a tribute to a custom; the custom of taking tea at five o'clock. And they haunted me.

In 1944, a new exigency arose. 'Black-out', the shortage of liquor, the shortage of food and the fact that almost everybody was working, had changed even long-established habits. One could not ask friends to dine, not many at a time anyway. A slap-up cocktail party just could not be managed, and 'Le Five o'Clock' was doomed.

But some people felt that something had to be done to defeat the monotony of the black-out; some way of getting together devised.

What transpired could scarcely be called a cocktail party, yet it was not a tea party. The drinks might be a little hard to define, but they were not coffee. The snacks were more substantial than *canapés*; less substantial than a fork repast. But everyone had a good time. Old faces met, old scandals were discussed. And a lot of new hats were worn. The 'Six o'clock' hat came into being.

Somehow these hats were, to my mind, the modern version of that wonderful, that enchanting edifice of straw and birds and china that as a boy in Copenhagen I had found so bewitching.

I made them in felt and in velvet. And I trimmed them; really trimmed them. Swags of tulle under the brim, tying under the chin, and on top a huge sentimental rose. Or layer upon layer of ruched silk with violets and velvet bows peeping out. They all had the 'dressed-up' look, the look that every woman out of uniform was longing for. Young ladies wore them for an evening out, middle-aged ones for the new parties, and older ones for bridge. They were the one grand way (coupon free) in which one could be feminine.

The shortages were still with us. In the shops the shelves were nearly bare. But men came home on leave, and they wanted to buy presents. In a last hope that I might have an idea—one or two wandered in to see me.

What about a hat? Could I make a hat as a present?

It was a nice idea but there was the difficulty of matching colours and also of knowing just what kind of hat the lady for whom the present was designed most needed. The

answer to this riddle came to me in what I think immodestly was 'an inspiration'. I would make miniature hats which could be exchanged for full-sized ones when brought back to me. And so I made dozens of little hats. Some of them were almost works of art; they looked really enchanting in their tiny hat-boxes. With each box was a card explaining that the miniature hat could be exchanged either for its full-sized counterpart or for another hat. A top milliner's hat, with Purchase Tax, cost up to ten guineas, but still many a major and major-general, and captains too, went away happy at solving his problem and knowing that his wife would be given pleasure.

This 'miniature' idea is now quite common, especially in America. There a man can give his wife a grand piano in miniature. Possibly he does not pay the full amount right away. But the idea is the same.

A last look at hats in that last year of war when lots of soldiers and sailors were being bowler-hatted. What could be more appropriate than a glimpse of some toppers and bowlers? These I made with a very special inspiration behind them. In *Picture Post* there had appeared a double spread of photographs showing Mr. (now Sir) Winston Churchill in an assortment of hats which he had made typically his own: round crowns, square crowns and high crowns.

My last big collection of the war was called the 'Churchill' collection.



## CHAPTER XI

**T**ORE down the black curtains. And I toasted Peace in my *ballon* glasses! I had a week of late nights, with no curfew. Ah! That curfew, a little prison for the mind. Then I walked down Regent Street with my cheque book at the 'ready'.

I had been able to communicate with my family but once throughout the war—whilst America was still neutral. That I could now go and see my family as soon as I liked seemed almost less real than those dreams I had so often dreamed.

There was a 'plane going to Gothenburg on the west coast of Sweden. From there I should be able to get another on to Denmark. I booked my seat.

Some of my fellow-passengers were Danes also making their first trip home for five years; a suave gent with an official-looking brief-case and two tough business types, their faces alternately flashing glimpses of hard confidence and disarming bonhomie. Our common interest lay in our longing to see our homes and families again.

At Gothenburg we got into the overheated airport bus which took us to the centre of the city. Then we made for the best hotel for a wash, and our first unrationed meal. It was all unbelievably easy. The business types radiated good humour; the suave gentleman swung his brief-case with surprising abandon. It might almost have contained nothing more important than a few atomic secrets!

In the hall of the hotel stood five telephone boxes, provoking a new thought. We could telephone home. Like excited schoolboys we made a dash for those telephone boxes, put calls through to Denmark and waited. As the calls came through each gaily disappeared into the gloom

of the box to emerge ten minutes later looking even more like schoolboys, this time with damp handkerchiefs, swollen eyes and red noses. The suave gentleman, the two tough types and not least myself.

Soon came the wonderful moment of homecoming. There was the whole family to meet me: mother, father, brothers, aunts and uncles. And, grown taller than the knee-high which was all they were in '39, the fresh faces of my two nieces waiting to whisper a shy *Hullo* to their strange uncle from war-torn Britain.

I had brought with me a box full of hats as presents for the ladies of my family. The Customs were dubious; was I going to start a hat shop? It was hardly feasible that I should have so *many* aunts. I finally convinced the officials that indeed I had and got through.

But I had a lot of other luggage too. In Sweden I had loaded up with all the good food that I could carry for I thought the Germans had not left much to eat. I had a ham, some butter, tins of this and that. Right at the bottom of my suitcase were two tins of Spam brought all the way from England.

The anticlimax came. One aunt, pressing me to come to dinner the next day, added rather anxiously, 'I'm afraid you can't have a steak today. It will have to be mutton chops.'

The star of England stood very high. Wherever I went I was questioned. By proxy I became almost a local hero, recounting tales of the black-out and the bombing, the shortages and the substitutes. I breakfasted with one relative and was torn away to have dinner with another.

Some old friends determined to throw a party for me. They had chosen a hall where one hundred and fifty people could sit. Then they asked what I should like to eat. Shortages were not so bad, and they planned a slap-up feast. But I was a sad disappointment. Yellow pea soup, hot boiled bacon with cold ham at the side, and brown bread and butter. With pancakes to follow. This is a traditional

Danish meal and with every bourgeois mouthful I recaptured a youthful pleasure.

The table decorations belied the humble menu. There were cartloads of flowers and a glittering assortment of glasses. But the really charming thing was the little hat which stood in front of each place. It was made from vegetables; little peas and pea pods on a potato brim, feathery carrot tops on a pale bean leaf. Each hat was a little gem. I could not help admiring them as well as being touched by the nice compliment. The young man who had made the hats came to be introduced. He had just opened a little hat shop in Copenhagen and begged me to look at his hats during my visit. The young man's name was Svend.

Svend is now quite a name in the hat world. He has taken his place amongst the 'modistes' of Paris. To me the talent was apparent even in that first year of peace. His work had less finish then, but it had two qualities which no number of lessons can confer and no amount of experience endow.

It is an odd thing about hat designing, and the way hats are made. No two designers work in quite the same fashion. As I sat in his little shop and watched him serve a customer, a line of Kipling returned to me from my days in India:

There are four and twenty ways of making tribal lays  
And each and every one of them is right.

Svend's way was not my way, but it certainly was right. Svend lets his imagination roam freely. Perhaps he will think of a *papillon* or a *marguerite* or an asymmetric shape. From these thoughts he will be able to create—and with very great artistry. From a choice of several each customer finds one.

For me the route is quite different. I must first of all visualize my client. Perhaps she has high cheek-bones and a pointed chin. I may take a bit of green velvet in my hand but perhaps only a piece of tissue folded to try an outline round the head. My feeling is to create something that belongs individually to this particular head. It is only

later that I allow the head to dictate the butterfly wings, or daisies, or a new line down the back of the left ear.

The thrill I feel when I have crumpled a bit of spartra into something about which I can justifiably say, '*It belongs to you, Madam,*' is terrific.

I went over to Copenhagen again that year. My old friend Robb, the artist, was on his way to Switzerland and I persuaded him to join me with my family at Christmas. It was a wonderful white Christmas. The first Christmas of Peace.

In the spring I went to Paris. I had been told that everything there was expensive, and indeed it was. Just to sniff the air seemed to cost money. But each sniff was a tonic. Whatever the war had done to the French, one thing remained unchanged. One could still feel that old intangible emanation of artistry. One apprehended it in the huge, flamboyant turban hats of the women—hideous in some respects but worn with chic purpose. One saw it in the sparse but valiant décor of the big shop windows, one felt sure it lived in the unexplored depths of the little out-of-the-way half-shops, displaying in their windows simply one pair of gloves and a scarf. It was amazing and invigorating.

Then, of course, there were all the old landmarks. I took a taxi at the Rond Point and sat by the driver in order to enjoy the long introduction to that magnificent outline of the Arc de Triomphe against a blue sky. I went to that incredible oblong of the Tuileries, surrounded so inspiringly and filled with so much beauty. I walked round till my poor feet ached and my shoes were covered in fine white dust. I knew I was in Paris then.

There were well-remembered faces too, and some of these were landmarks in themselves. Especially I remember my old friend Madame ——. Madame inhabits the underground *toilette* in the Place Madeleine; a voluminous figure of respect and respectability. There she sat as I had known her to sit for years and years, spilling over her diminutive chair, almost overshadowing the small table with the chipped

oilcloth top where reposed so obviously, the saucer inviting—no, *commanding*—a *pourboire*.

Just across the road is Cook's. I had cashed a cheque, crossed to the Madeleine and, unthinkingly, was half-way down the steps leading to Madame's territory, when I caught a glimpse of her. It was as though the track of a film had got stuck. There she was exactly as six years before. I dashed up to the little flower market at the top, bought a bunch of roses and descended again.

'Madame. . . .'

'*Monsieur! Mais quel plaisir . . . .* It is wonderful to see you back again. It is marvellous. *Et comment allez vous?*'

Madame's welcome had the charm of genuineness. She nevertheless did not neglect to push the saucer towards me. '*Pour le service, Monsieur.*'

But afterwards, 'What are you doing this afternoon? *Il y a une petite coquette, ma nièce, qui va célébrer son jour de naissance cette après-midi.*' Her little niece had a birthday party that day, on the premises!

How French, that party! The customers came to wash their hands, to have a shoe polish or, what to the French was equally unremarkable, to patronize *l'établissement*. At the head of the tiny table, now laid out with cups and saucers and decorated with my little bunch of roses, sat Madame. At her side was the little '*coquette*' in a print muslin frock, her pale, honey-coloured oval face luminous with two brown eyes fringed with long brown lashes. Mother, sister and boy friend were all there. We ate coffee cake and drank hot chocolate. It was the friendliest party although Madame's attention was necessarily divided.

'*Pour le service, Monsieur,*' she said at intervals, passing her saucer of five-franc pieces. '*Pour le service.*'

It was enchanting to revisit the old haunts of fashion. Not the big couture houses, but those other houses where fashion really begins, the *fournisseurs*. A whole book might be written about them; they are the backbone of the trade, the inspiration and the *modus vivendi* of French fashion. The flower-makers, button-makers, belt-makers, cloth

designers, cloth dyers and the designers of fine silks. It is they who are the real poets of the couture trade. Their goods sing out and cry to be made into some beautiful creation. Just to see them is to flush with the zeal and fervour of wanting to create. They spark off new conceptions, new fashions.

Back to Monsieur, and his family, the rose-makers. To Maison Leri where are the most beautiful veils in the world. And to Maison Lurot who have the loveliest feathers.

Some of the *fournisseurs* are in the most out-of-the-way places and some in fashionable precincts. The Rue Royale, with its lovely old doorways and court-yards, at one time housed many rich commercial families; there still remain one or two of the old firms, unchanged in outward appearance.

The huge door will be the same, the bell that is answered by an invisible hand opening the door. Inside, the same polished parquet floor and the same high, old-fashioned desks. The ledger books here must date back almost to their first customer, Eve.

I went into one house famous for its feathers. A familiar Mademoiselle Marcelle came to greet me, her spectacles a trifle thicker now that her eyes were more short-sighted; her bun not quite so luxuriant.

And Monsieur Gaston. His wig was a little larger but otherwise he was the same. His jacket and neckwear showed no concessions to changing styles, he still had his old-fashioned boots that made a click, click, click as he crossed the parquet. His manner was as punctilious as ever to the customer, as exacting to members of the house. And, one could sense, as upright in the House of God.

The boxes with their dark green covers and brass handles and the glass case were all the same. The background all well remembered. But here is magic. Every season, every season the feathers will be different. They are only quills; I know that. But last year they went this way and had a velvet stub and were red. This year they are yellow; and a

short green one is imposed on each and tied with a silver thread. The new feathers follow fashion. No. They *make* fashion.

I was thrilled. There was the same old cupboard, but out of it came new treasures. I held one feather in my hand. It had movement, a swagger. I could see it on a hat. I could see the nose and the chin; I could see the whole figure. It was for a flippant woman, or for a distinguished woman if you used it another way. Or for a lady who cracks bottles on the prows of great ships.

The feather compelled me. I loved it; I had to have it. 'Ça, c'est combien?' I asked.

The answer was *unbelievable*. Nothing cost less than three thousand francs!

Did it drop from my hand like a hot cake? If it did I caught it in its downward flight. I had to have this feather. I could not do without it. I would go without eating; I would go home early. But I must take with me that feather.

There must have been others in those days when the guns quieted, and the currencies went haywire, who similarly felt this human hunger for colour and line and texture. One might find what satisfied in a bit of ribbon, in a spray of flowers or in a feather.

The decoration in my hand was only made of quills; simply yellow and green quills. But they were put together with that 'something' that we had missed all those years.

It was chic that one was searching for and the *fournisseurs* were founts of inspiration. Less translatable was the chic of the huge hats which the Frenchwomen were flaunting in the faces of the departing Germans. Some of them as big as sofa cushions. No British woman would wear hats as exaggerated as those; and no American anything as heavy, half an ounce being about their limit.

The French were soon changing to lighter styles, shrugging off the old ones with a pooh-pooh. '*On a fait seulement pour les Allemands.*'

That was a happy visit. I am sorry to say that some subsequent trips have been less enjoyable.

Looking through my scrapbooks for 1946 and 1947 reminds me that I used a great many feathers then. But special feathers. They were ostrich plumes, and not from Paris. I have always loved ostrich plumes. Can there be any more romantic way of trimming a wide brim? A walk through any gallery of Old Masters gives splendid confirmation of the inherent beauty in the soft lines of a curling plume. But the romantic use is not the only one. A few tiny ends can look as arch as any trimming. And then there is the traditional regal manner of using them. The next eighteen months were to see many occasions when I should use ostrich plumes, and in very different ways. But as yet coming events were unpatterned.

I stood in the Mall one morning in 1946. It was June, but the sky was grey and promised rain. In spite of this the pavements down either side were deeply packed with people. Looking towards the Admiralty Arch the oncoming drifts of newcomers presaged even greater density.

They came with excited and animated faces. Young folk uninhibitedly half running down the centre of the road, anxious to find some still vacant point of vantage. Older people with that queer look of a mechanism geared to top speed but with an invisible brake pulling against it. . . . But still they were hurrying, and all with a light in their eyes.

The kerbs were already claimed, staked out with mackintosh, rug and thermos flask. The hardy ones had been there since dawn; but though they might have missed their sleep they were in as boisterous a flag-waving mood as the late-comers.

It was the day of the Victory Parade. A week before, I had been summoned to Buckingham Palace and asked to design a hat for Her Majesty the Queen to wear on this historic occasion. My friend Mr. Hartnell had made the costume, so I went along to him to match the colour. It was a lovely pinky lilac, rather difficult to match. I should have to get something specially dyed.

I made two hats, and took them to Buckingham Palace for Her Majesty to make a choice. One of them had to be



finished by first thing the next morning, and that would mean fast work for my staff and myself.

I fitted the hat which the Queen chose and took it back to my workroom. It was finished in good time but, looking at it, I was not altogether satisfied. I had wanted this hat to be really wonderful, unforgettable. Something that had regal dignity but at the same time was a 'happy' hat in keeping with the happy occasion. But I had not yet got the effect I wanted.

It was the eleventh hour—anyway, the tenth. But I had another idea. If I used some ostrich plumes in a special way, I was sure I could do something better. I was in a fever.

I had two willing girls and they agreed to stay and work all night if need be. We set to at five o'clock that evening. At two o'clock next morning that hat was completed and I knew it was right.

I found the girls a taxi, pushed them in and went back to pack the hat myself. I put it in a box along with the other hat which the Queen had already approved. I enclosed a note explaining what I had done and expressing the belief that the second hat was the nicer. Then I went home and set the alarm for six o'clock. By eight I had delivered the hat at the Palace. And now, here I was mingling with the crowds in the Mall. As anxious as any one of them to catch a glimpse of the Royal carriage.

Crowds are not always fun. But this one was in a happy humour. It could rain or it could snow, they were out to celebrate. And celebrate they would. I felt as light-hearted as they, for the very air was intoxicating.

The olive-green of the American helmets went by, the red tarbooshes of Egypt, and the red pompons of the French sailors; the blue tassels of the Greek 'Kilties', the khaki helmets and silver spikes of the Transjordan contingent, the wonderful Guardsmen, the blue and gold of the sailors, and a host more. But when Their Majesties passed looking so wonderfully, magnificently royal, yet at the same time responding so humanly to the crowds, I cheered myself hoarse with the rest. It was a special pleasure to notice that

Her Majesty the Queen was wearing *the* hat. And I felt proud and humble, too. Then I went home to sleep the rest of the day out.

Busvine required the whole of their premises again so I was faced with another move. It was not easy to find a suitable place at that time when so many business premises lay in ruins, but I finally decided, after a good deal of traipsing to and fro, on a 'bombed-out' place in Hanover Square. It was huge and I should not be allowed to spend more than one hundred pounds on renovations. I looked again at its dusty and doubtful seclusion, and had misgivings.

But that old saying about necessity being the mother of invention has its counterpart in the Danish language: Necessity teaches the naked woman to spin. The sheer improbability of this shambles ever looking like a Mayfair hat salon on one hundred pounds drove me to fantasy.

Corrugated cardboard once again. I had the whole place lined with it. Then I bought a quantity of rejected parachutes. They were a lovely, deep sky-blue with white stripes, and with these draped from the walls to the ceiling I made a sort of sheik's tent. Just for a touch of amusement and naughtiness, I hung golden cherubs all round. In the centre was a gold-painted chandelier. It only needed Marlene Dietrich and it would have been complete. I loved it, and the customers loved it. The only thing was that if anyone had sneezed it would all have fallen down.

The different customers I had about this time! Geoffrey Wright had just written a catchy little tune and another friend had put some verses to it and called it 'Don't be afraid of colour'. It gave me the idea for a show at the Curzon Cinema. People were tired of dreary colours. I would call my show 'Don't be afraid of colour'!

I had two very charming models and Kay Young, the first Mrs. Michael Wilding, had agreed to help. The idea was that she should come on to the stage looking pale, forlorn and sad. After she had gone Geoffrey, who was at the piano, would strike up with 'Don't be afraid of colour', and I would jump from the stalls, pockets brimming over

with red roses and blue handkerchiefs. As the music got gayer and gayer, Kay was to look happier and happier. After she had gone off the stage the model girls would appear and show a lot of colourful hats. Naturally, the Press were there.

All went well. There was a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of clapping and the usual dazzle and pop of the photographers' bulbs. Until all at once the photographers became aware of the personalities sitting in the boxes. I had invited practically the whole of the Diplomatic Corps and the glitter of the occasion proved too much for the photographers.

Amongst the diplomatic ladies was the Russian Ambassador's wife, Madame Gussev, and with her was Mr. Vishinsky's daughter. And with each of them a solemn and poker-faced bodyguard.


Madame Gussev and Miss Vishinsky were the first to leave and, in order to say good-bye, I had first to crawl under the stage. I think the guards must have viewed this with a certain amount of suspicion. But it seemed that Madame Gussev liked my hats for next day, without warning, the guard came up in my lift and, following him, Madame Gussev and Miss Vishinsky.

I fitted a hat for Madame Gussev. It was an expensive one with a lot of feathers. It certainly became Madame Gussev but I was nevertheless rather surprised when she repeated the order and asked for another hat just the same. She explained half in French and half in German that it was for a present to a great Soviet woman artist. A rather unusual compliment, I thought.

I made the two hats identical. Since Miss Vishinsky had shown a great deal of interest I asked if I might make something for her too.

The answer was simple: '*Niet!*' No!

## CHAPTER XII

EBORAH KERR, exuberant with good looks and good health, came bubbling in to see me. She was off to America and wanted a very special hat for a film called *The Hucksters*. Clark Gable and Ava Gardner were the other stars, Gable playing the part of a down-and-out ex-officer who makes good in a big advertising job. Miss Kerr's role was to be a society widow; Ava Gardner was the young rival.

'Who gets who?' I quipped.

Need I have bothered? A widow and the 'other woman' might make an imponderable equation, but a widow plus a hat . . . Euclid, I feel, would have had no bother with this one.

Now that the Atlantic was again open to ordinary traffic, I saw a great many old friends and customers, some going to, some coming back from America. The customers' orders were for more than one hat at a time. Hats were still the one coupon-free article of clothing. And one could cut a dash with a hat.

After Deborah Kerr the next customer to be leaving for America was another redhead, Miss Sarah Churchill. The Churchill twinkle was in her eye and the Churchill fire and force. But more than that she possessed the Churchill capacity to comprehend a new idea. If I had, tucked away in my cupboards, a hat forecasting something new in line or material I did not fear showing it to Miss Churchill. She was ahead of me.

Crossing the Atlantic from the other direction came Miss Heather Thatcher. And with Miss Thatcher arrived a problem that is a talking point with many women: 'Do hats

go with spectacles?' Or rather an eyeglass? Miss Thatcher wore a monocle, and Miss Thatcher regarded hats as being even more important for herself than for most women. When the hat was made we agreed that it really suited that particular eyeglass.

Another customer from America was a lady whom I did not at first recognize. I bowed. 'Madam . . .' 'Don't you know me, Mr. Thaarup?' she asked. The lovely voice seemed familiar, but not that chin. Or was it the laugh? I felt myself rushing headlong into a horrid indiscretion, but saved myself in time. I could have *cried*, however. The lady's face certainly was different; whilst in America she had had her nose shortened!

Almost on her heels came the beautiful Mrs. Reginald Fellowes. Her lovely forehead and decisive profile were so different, and refreshing. I could not help reflecting on this lady's looks and that other's composite visage. With every milligram of flesh and bone that the surgeon had thrown away had surely gone a ton of irreplaceable character. Whoever started that foolish idea?

Mrs. Fellowes had come in without warning, but hers was a face to kindle inspiration. There and then I took a piece of canvas and twisted and pinned it into the semblance of a hat. It should be a hat of the *grande époque* with a big frou of multi-coloured ostrich plumes. I put it on her. One could see that it had the makings of a hat of immense distinction and charm—but then, it was for a face of distinction and charm! I looked sadly at the little velvet cap for the other lady.

It certainly was invigorating once again to be meeting friends from overseas and others now released from the Forces or up from the country. The social season began to perk up too. And then there were parties.

The parties I enjoyed as much as the reviving trade. Not so much the champagne that now flowed again, withal in a slimmer stream, but also the wit and fun. It seemed almost incredible after so long being used to meeting only one or two friends at a time, that so many could now fore-

gather. Perhaps those first parties had a very special flavour simply because of their newness. I particularly remember one party given by Oliver Messel. Quite early in the evening it was obvious that the company was going to be a starry one. One after another, famous artists and stars from the stage or screen drifted in. Gentlemen bowed eighteenth-century stage bows, ladies blew kisses across the room from long black-gloved fingers. Heads tossed, bangles jangled and the perfumes of all Araby mingled. There were accents from America, and from more than one Continental country. Sitting next to me was Mrs. Bodel Kjer, the stage star from Denmark.

'If only Orson Welles and Noël Coward were here as well,' she joked.

'And Bea Lillie,' I added.

Almost at that moment the door opened and all three walked in!

My scrapbook for the beginning of this year of 1946 shows that provided she could afford a model hat, a woman must have been very silly indeed if she could not find one that did something for her looks and personality.

There were, of course, general trends, but each of these could be translated in a dozen different ways, to fit this sort of life or that sort of face or the other sort of figure. In clothes it is different. When the waist moves from here to there, and the bosom from there to here, a woman must conform—somehow. That is if she wants to be anywhere near the first half-yard of fashion.

The general influence just then was for a forward movement with the brim—a thick one—jutting out right over the nose. The brim was really the whole hat. It might be made thick with massed flowers or ribbon bows or ruching. Or it might be severely plain, with a fall of curling cock feathers or soft drapes at the back. Though one was conscious that each of these spelled out the current phase in hats, in fact they could each cater for a different head.

But the interesting thing is that at the same time I made a box full of other hats none of which owed any allegiance

to the popular line but which nevertheless looked unassailably 'right'. Nor were they designed only for the bold spirit that 'gets away with murder'. They simply followed the rule that a hat should do something for a woman.

There was the huge flat sailor. It stood out a mile as a hat. One felt no need to question whether it was fashionable. And the highwayman hat that had so little to do with the current trend; the toque that positively defied the prevailing forward movement, and swept clear of the brow. The cavalier hat with the boldly sweeping pheasant feather, and the pimento-red pillbox. They were all as individual as flowers in a border and as differently appealing.

Looking at pictures of these hats I am glad that I have never tried to force all women into the same pattern. I never have insisted on the fashionable line when another could do more for a woman.

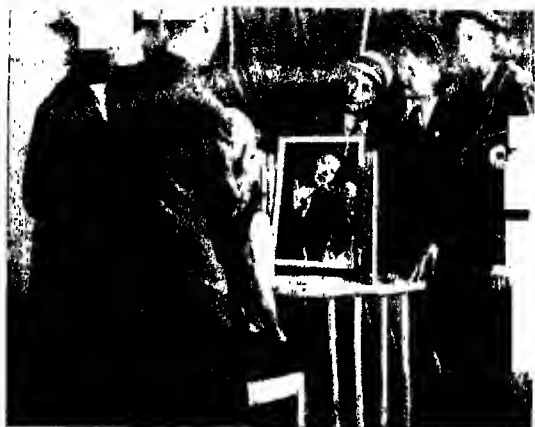
A journalist writing about these particular hats remarked, 'They awaken unexpected notions on what you can do with your face.' And then she added, 'When the man in your life does not notice the hat you are wearing it is time to send that one to the rummage sale.' Perhaps that is one of the *widow's* secrets.

My sheik's tent of a showroom, although well liked and successful, had one particular difficulty: the fact that it was impossible to leave a car parked outside. There came the day when I was warned that I was about to be honoured by a visit from H.R.H. the Duchess of Gloucester.

It was not the first time that I had made hats for the Duchess, but it was the first time that she had visited these premises, and it reminded me a little of that first royal visit years before when I had hastily pinned down some red carpet on the garret stairs. This time I had to go out and have a talk with the policeman on duty.

We fixed the parking that day, but afterwards I took my hats round to York House for fittings. What a strange and fascinating place is York House. From the front it is all on one level with its neighbours; St. James's Chapel on one side and the Ambassadors' Court on the other. But

*'Teen and Twenty' hats  
shown to a young  
audience*



*The very first hat designed for  
this collection*



*A schoolgirl tries on a model*





*H.M. the Queen as Princess Elizabeth wearing the famous tricorné at the Trooping the Colour ceremony*

if you go behind where, twenty-four hours a day, the guards march up and down, and where at night when the guard is changed they come with swinging lanterns, you can see all the different levels. The little door where I went with my hats was at the side, and then to get to Her Royal Highness's room was rather like going up a ski-slope.

Soon after I made these hats the Duke of Gloucester was appointed Governor of Australia. For the Duchess's stay out there Peter Russell had made suits and topcoats and I was to make the hats.

At that time I knew very little about Australia. I had never been there and I numbered very few Australians amongst my customers. I had to work at those hats, trying to fit them to the different climate and seasons; and the different occasions about which I did not know a great deal. There still remained another problem.

Whenever I make hats for a Royal Lady, if she is travelling I like, when possible, to see that there is someone who can give expert attention to the hats. But since I had not been to Australia, and had no Australian milliner contacts, I was in a quandary. There was just one firm in Melbourne to whom I had sold some hats. I telegraphed them. Yes, of course, they would be delighted to do all that was necessary, steaming and pressing and so on. I felt satisfied, and turned that page in my ledgers without an inkling of any further developments, never dreaming that one day I should myself go to Australia and be so attracted by that country that I was almost tempted to stay.

One of the complications which all milliners suffered after the war was the shortage of skilled workers. The shortage had been apparent before the war, and although we had all done what we could to encourage the training schools to keep going, the number of apprentices available now was exceedingly small. The L.C.C. do a lot of good work, but what a pity more girls do not qualify. It seems to me that the girl with sensitive fingers and a critical eye—and you have only to look round at the number of young things who trim their figures and artfully pull a bit

of felt on to their head, to know that there are many—would find a great deal of satisfaction in millinery. More satisfaction, I should have thought, than in repetitive factory work or interminable typewriter banging.

Sometimes I have been asked to judge the work at one or other of the training schools. I go down to Hammersmith or Paddington, knowing nothing about the girls and not knowing what to expect. There are young and pretty girls, and there are others not so young, or so pretty. I walk round looking, examining. Some of the hats are very charming indeed, and some not at all so. The pretty hats are not always done by the pretty girls, nor the poor ones by the plainer girls. It provokes thought.

Each hat has for me a message. Each hat is a manifesto of the *character* rather than the personal looks of the girl who made it; there to be read as surely as a cobbler reads character from the way a shoe is worn. One hat tells of a lazy girl and another of a painstaking one. There is the girl ponderous of thought and touch and the one who likes quick effects. The girl with imagination, and the conventional type; the girl who feels the vibration of colour on colour and the girl who is timid about anything but the orthodox.

I go round dreaming till out of all these hats suddenly one will shine like Venus amongst the stars. It is a *hat*. It may be only a little check boater—all students make check boaters—but the size of the crown and the thickness of the brim is right. And there is *real* workmanship. You can see it a mile off.

'Now, who made that little hat?' I ask. And when I meet the little lady, whether she is one of the young and pretty ones or one of the others, I ask if she would like to join my workrooms. In this way I have more than once found a real artist, one with both vision and craftsmanship.

I spoke of the period which was memorable to me for the ostrich plumes I used. I had always loved these feathers; they are possibly a milliner's most dramatic and beautiful trimming. I had used them from time to time whatever the

prevailing fashion. At times they were more 'in' than at others, but towards the end of 1946 they became really important.

The King and Queen were going on a State visit to South Africa and taking with them the two Princesses. Ostrich feathers were dictated for this occasion mainly by the fact that they were one of South Africa's exports. The use of ostrich plumes would not only be a nice compliment but would have tangible results to the trade of that country.

The 'New Look' was not yet in. Skirts were still short and hats high and heavy. They had by now gone back, framing the face and showing the hair-line on the forehead. Not, you might think, the most suitable of lines for ostrich plumes. But an ostrich plume is a marvellously adaptable thing, and has been 'right' for all classes, at all sorts of times.

I was called to the Palace. When the Queen had made known her wishes I called on Mr. Norman Hartnell to see the royal dresses so that the hats should suit them and the colours be right. I went back to the Palace, and it was then that the Queen asked me if I would also make some hats for Princess Elizabeth. Then, one day when Princess Margaret was watching the fittings, I was asked if I could make hats for her, too. 'I should certainly like to try,' I answered.

Designing hats fit for this splendid occasion was one thing. Taking into account the mosquitoes and the tropical insects, the way a pin gets rusty if it is exposed to certain weather was another. Thinking of the hot weather, and the strong sun, and the windy reviewing stands—it was quite a job.

There were teasing packing problems to be studied, too. Since the royal party would actually live on the train for a great part of the time, their luggage would also remain on the train. South African lines have a narrow gauge, and consequently the trains are longer. It was important, therefore, that the royal maids should be able to unpack the appropriate garments without ransacking a dozen trunks, so each trunk had to be labelled 'Hartnell dress No. 1', 'Thaarup hat No. 1', 'Gloves and shoes No. 1', and so on.

Even down to the jewellery which was to be worn with each separate costume.

Nor did the organizing end there. Perhaps the royal party's itinerary showed a stop at 'X-ville'. It could be estimated that, except for something quite unusual, it would be fine and hot at midday. A shady brim and a cool frock would therefore be appropriate. But it might be evening-time, with the sun coming in from the horizon, when a feathered hat or a fur cape would be required.

All these things had to be planned in great detail, and worked out with the royal maids. But what patience and resource these charming ladies brought to the subject. And hard work too, as anyone who has any knowledge of a Royal Tour knows.

Towards the end of '46, just before the start of the South African visit, I found myself working at fever-heat. To have been asked to make the hats of the three royal ladies for this first post-war tour was a signal honour, and I had to live up to it. I felt a real excitement, too. Everyone was sick of dull wartime austerity. I wanted to make these hats really gay and charming. When I was not worrying about the Cape wind, the insects and those boxes, I saw an illimitable canvas of blue sky and sunshine.

Whilst designing these hats a duplicate half of me was working almost as furiously on a big hat show to be given early in the New Year. There had been in existence for some time now a group which we called rather grandiosely 'The Associated Millinery Designers of London'. I had already produced more than one show for this group, and was now scrambling around on last-minute arrangements for another, to be held at the Dorchester Hotel. Apart from helping with arrangements for seating, refreshments, publicity and invitations, I had also my own hats to design. And the most exciting thing was that Princess Elizabeth had graciously consented to be present. It was to be Princess Elizabeth's first fashion show.

The year turned and on the eve of the show everything seemed set fair. Then one model developed a cold. Another

suddenly changed the colour of her hair! I said a prayer that none of the rest would decide to get married, go to America, or even (for some were married) decide to have a baby.

A further piece of excitement came at the last moment. When, at Buckingham Palace, I fitted the hat which I had made for the young Princess to wear at this show, I suggested that Her Royal Highness should have gloves to match the hat. The hat was in a soft Dresden blue, and I knew that it was useless to search for gloves that colour. We were still suffering the strictest shortages of such little luxuries, and one was lucky to find any blue at all.

I got some white gloves and a piece of the blue silk from which the hat was made and tumbled into the first taxi. 'The nearest dyers,' I shouted. The driver looked at me as though I had said '*hospital*'. Without a word he circled and whirled me off. The dyers were not nearly so understanding, nor forthcoming. But they did finally see the urgency of my request, and the gloves were dyed by the next day. I sent them straight off to Buckingham Palace. But then another awful doubt arose. Were the gloves the right size? For there had been no time to check.

How happy I was when the Princess arrived at the show that night and, as I received her, I saw that she was wearing them. And visibly they fitted exactly.

Early in 1947 the royal party left for South Africa. And my scrapbook for that period is one of the fattest. Necessarily, since newsprint was so severely rationed in England, a great many of the full-page pictures I treasure are from South African papers, but the home Press did not do so badly. They gave a stirring graphic account of the visit; its pageantry and yet its democratic flavour. And as strong as the sunshine shining through it all is the moving charm of a lovely, united and beloved family.

There are banners in the streets, and banner 'heads' across the pages record: '25,000 acclaim the King and Queen on Cape Town drive.' 'Natal acclaims their Majesties.' 'Dunbar. . . . ' 'Ladysmith. . . .' In Cape Town there are long lines of Cape Town Highlanders; in Ladysmith the King

and Queen chat with ex-service men. General Smuts welcomes the King in Natal. An eager mob of children in their best frocks each carrying a little Union Jack on a stick press forward. The mayor in his gown and fur leads the way in one picture. In half a dozen the inevitable shining 'little maid' presents her bouquet with seemly confusion.

There is a State visit to the Houses of Parliament, and an informal one to the races. As I flick through the pages my eye is caught for a moment by the ostrich plumes which nod and wave under that brilliant sun. The young Princesses put up a sunshade or a tentative hand to shade their eyes. The Queen never loses her lovely smile. And on the King's brow barely a shadow of the illness which he must already have been feeling.

The next few pages are vivid with pictures of the Royal family back in England, touring, touring. 'Welcome back to Deeside.' 'Their Majesties tour the Royal Show in Yorkshire.' 'How Norfolk welcomed the King and Queen.' The plumes continue to nod and wave, in carriage, motor-car and on platform.

But this was not the end of plumes for that year. Ascot was back. Strawberries were back; grey toppers and morning suits. And plumes!

Then there was the occasion of the Opening of Parliament. It is traditional that for this event the Queen accompanies the reigning Monarch. The Queen's dress for this event is formal and regal, with a very long train. To balance this long train and to carry out the dignity of the ensemble some sort of head-dress is essential. One cannot call it a hat; it is more in the nature of a coif. On this occasion, Princess Elizabeth, as heiress presumptive to the throne, was to accompany the King and Queen. So I had two 'coifs' to design.

The Queen's gown was stiffly magnificent in a shining white and blue metal brocade; the Princess's of shell pink. For the Queen I used some beautiful curling feathers mounted on a casque and rising high in front. For Princess Elizabeth I arranged an asymmetrical frame of shell pink

plumes sitting above the hair line and curling down one side of the face. There surely is no better time than a royal occasion for using this form of decoration.

Yet as I continue to turn the pages the soft fronds do wave deliciously for many lesser moments. Here they sweep grandly, there they softly curl. Sometimes they stand solitary and emblematical as they were perhaps first used by some dusky monarch. And I have even used them waggishly.

Why do I love these feathers? I love them partly because of their royal associations and for their historical associations, too. True, one cannot say that ostrich plumes are wholly feminine; in past ages most manly men have made splendid use of them. Have we not the fleur-de-lys? But I do consider them delightfully suitable to a woman. The tenuous fronds with light playing through their edges can transmute colours into the most delicate shades. Every zephyr stirs the curls. The flutter of fringed eyelids is scarcely more tantalizing. The milliner's artifice aids and abets, but their charm is intrinsic.

Before the year was out I had the honour of making hats for Princess Elizabeth's trousseau, including her 'going away' hat. But before I had stitched the last plume, a big turn had been taken in my affairs. I had launched myself in the wholesale trade. And in quite a big way.

It started one lunch-time. Yes, it is always at lunch-time that these things happen to me. I was sitting in a taxi-cab when the idea came to me. It was not entirely new, for I had dabbled in this in a minor way during the war. But now I envisaged something bigger altogether.

I was thinking of the new generation of young girls—just out of school, or just released from the Services. They were a new type, they had moved into their 'teens during the war, and because of this were abnormally innocent of dress knowledge, especially hats. Their experience went no further than a flannel pork pie with a purple and pink badge, or else a glengarry or a peaked cap.

They might be debutantes doing a belated 'season'. These got by with an expensive hair-do, and perhaps a wisp



of chiffon. They might belong to that other greatly swelled band of young women who, whatever their status, took it as the natural thing to become workers. One has almost forgotten that this was not always the way of things. But anyway these young women, though they might metaphorically take off their coats to do a job, had no hats worthy of the name to take off.

No hat to wave, no hat to dress up for the cinema. No hat to wear prettily for a boy friend, or cutely for the interview with a new boss. No hat to cheer up last year's coat, or the suit of the year before. With a rather empty-sounding bravura they professed not to 'care' for hats. The fact was that the price of a good model hat was now beyond the scope of their pockets.

I sat in the taxi-cab vaguely vexing my mind with all this. It was my old friend, Inger Sonsthagen, sitting beside me in the cab, who had reawakened these thoughts. She sat there looking charming in a hat borrowed from my show collection. Inger never had more than one suit and five blouses—or was it five jackets and one skirt? Whichever it was, she had a delectable way of always looking fresh and polished. But she loved a good hat.

I leaned forward and asked the driver to stop and set me down. Poor Inger. We had lunched and were on our way to take coffee at a Mayfair café which I wanted to show her and now I was sitting on a park bench worrying out this idea, whilst my companion, having excused me, went home alone.

I had made up my mind that I was going to design hats for young people and somehow find a way of having them marketed in quantity for sale all over Britain. And at prices that young women could afford. As I sat under the trees in Green Park there loomed in my mind a picture of just the person I wanted to help me in this big venture. And I meant it to be a really big venture.

I would make these hats genuine 'fashion' hats—for no woman is so hot on the trail of fashion as the young one. I would make them becoming and piquant, I would make

them useful but, above all, youthful. And each should look like a really good hat. Of course I also had in mind to oust the woollen scarf and the silk square. They have their charm. Worn round the neck!

I crossed Piccadilly and marched east. With no special target I was simply turning and twisting the whole project in my mind. There was this one special woman with whom I must get in touch. I could not remember her name but her face and manner were as vivid as in a film flash-back.

I had only met her once or twice, when she had come up from Luton to see me, and to buy models which she could adapt for the retail trade. It was the way she handled a hat, the feeling with which she held it, and the sense with which she spoke of it, that had so impressed me. I could tell that she had real understanding of hats. I *must* get in touch with her.

By now I was feeling gloriously confident about this airy adventure. But it was certainly annoying not to be able to remember the name of that so important lady.

It was late lunch-hour by the time I got to Piccadilly Circus. I was almost biting my finger-nails. I turned the corner and started up Regent Street. At the top I turned into Verreys momentarily with nothing more on my mind than a long orange drink. From the bar, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a lady sitting at one of the little tables sipping coffee. The lady of the hats! *The* lady.

It was unbelievable! I had nearly burnt myself up in my march from the park trying all the time to conjure up that name. Now, whatever was still expendable I launched at her table and in ten minutes she was as enthusiastic as myself.

'It could be done,' she said firmly.

'It shall be done!' I thought.

Like many similar ideas, its inception was a careless rapture compared with the more solid work of carrying the job out. To design these hats so that they could be marketed at a reasonable price meant endless chopping and changing of materials. Endless manœuvring of shapes so that without

loss of chic they could be mass produced. Interminable searching for competitively priced trimmings; arguments with hood manufacturers; consultations with the block-makers. And, finally, a suitable marketing concern had to be found. But I had this competent ally, and that meant much in that early organizing.

I felt confident that when the scheme was sufficiently advanced I should soon be able to interest some good-class firm; and indeed the first big store that I approached took to it. Marshall & Snelgrove, with their rather special clientele and their extensive chain of stores throughout the country, were exactly the right market. They were interested right away and soon I was discussing terms. There was just one more thing that had to be settled. What was I to call these hats? The little silk label inside each hat would bear my name, but the hats themselves must have a title, a sort of 'trademark' by which they could be asked for and sold.

Just for the fun of it I would like to say that the title 'came to me at lunch-time', but in fact it was whilst I was sitting and having a cup of tea with some friends. We were at the Dorchester rehearsing for that big hat show for the Associated Milliners. A half-word from one friend and a phrase from another and I got it. The hats should be called 'Teen and Twenty'.

Of course the scheme had growing pains and plenty of booby traps, too. But it was a success. The hats, I feel, did do something to help bring the 'off-the-peg' hat out of its post-war doldrums. Certainly the demand for them became very great. Soon hats were being sent all over the world. From Iceland to Timbuctu. And if, for young girls, these hats supplied a real want, I was happy.

Because these hats had real design and real fashion news in them and yet truly catered for the young and unsophisticated, they soon got talked about. And soon, too, they became the target of not only the girls for whom they were designed but of another class no less interested, the copyists. What a world within worlds this fashion business is!

Naturally, the hats had 'seasons'. Everybody would know approximately when a new batch of hats might be expected, but the exact time might vary each season by as much as a fortnight.

Did this set the copyists at a disadvantage? Not at all. It was as though thought-reading were their natural science. On the first day, *the first*, on which a new collection would be on view in the store, mingling with the strictly county and account customers would be others of a less determinable type. Little women and tall women; yellow-haired ones and mousy ones.

You might suppose, watching these particular ladies, that they were buying buns at the bakers. For they never tried on the hats. They simply handed over their sixty-nine and sixpence and scurried off. It seemed not to worry the mousy one that her hat was in shocking pink, or the bold black-haired one that she had chosen something in grey.

All that mattered was that these ladies got their hats and got them quickly. One could guess, of course, that once outside the shop, the hat became quite significant. And when each lady was at last able to take it out of its bag, her interest, I have no doubt, perked up quite a lot. She probably took a magnifying glass to it then. Anyway, it would be only two days later that Madame Charmante and Madame Embonpoint—if such there are—were showing in their windows reproductions of a reproduction of a model hat.

It is a funny thing, all this plagiarism which goes on throughout the dress trade and on both sides of the Channel. It does not worry me because I have never felt any dearth of ideas; only the need of more hours per day in which to develop them. And because, maddening though it sometimes is, there is no way of stopping it. You cannot patent a hat; it would be more easy to patent a button.

Amongst my friends and proper competitors I make no secrets. When I have made something that I think is nice, I feel quite friendly about it. Naturally, I am a bit proud of the hat; I want to show it to someone. And I do. It could

be a man or a woman, or even an elephant, that comes in to see me. I just have to put out my nicest hats. Or what I think are my nicest, and hope for a bit of praise.

'Come and see,' I say. 'Have a look at my work.' And I open the cupboards; all of them.

'Look, this is not only what I have done, and am doing, but this is what I'm going to do.'

Only recently someone came over from Paris and I showed them a new metallic stitching on velour. It was pretty and the stitching interested my visitor very much. 'All right,' I said, 'I'll get you some patterns of the thread and send them to you.'

But I must say that, with very few exceptions, this friendly kind of traffic is rather one way. Especially between here and Paris. There seems to be always something a little in the way, something that prevents one really seeing anything worth while, when one goes there.

Naturally, when I am making hats for royalty I have to exercise particular care. With all respect to the 'niceness' of the men in the manufacturing world, a scoop such as a preview of an important royal hat would be irresistible to their business natures, however dewy-eyed. A particular example of this was Princess Elizabeth's 'going away' hat. Even to my workroom girls I hid its identity. This hat was for Mrs. Smith, and this one for Mrs. Snooks, or Miss Macdonald. Only I knew which of them was special.

In 1947 I was asked to accept the chairmanship of the Associated Millinery Designers of London Group, which had several members all producing hats for the wholesale market. One of our objects—in common with almost every manufacturer, whether of cardigans or cars—was to interest the Americans. We had done a certain amount of good work towards this end and had had some rewards. Now a big American manufacturer came forward with a proposal.

Since we were still labouring under the handicap of after-war shortages, his suggestion that he should send us felts which we could make up and then show in America made us prick up our ears. He was also sending felts to Hollywood,

New York and Paris. There would be plenty of competition.

The publicity I had received in the last year was terrific. I had made royal hats, I had launched my 'Teen and Twenty' hats; the time seemed right for me to see what I could do abroad. The other members of the Association agreed. They would each make a collection of hats and send them to America. I would go over and help organize a show and compère for the lot.

Off I sped to the appropriate Government departments to apply for the dollars, visa and the rest. Forms, explanations, more forms, met me, as they have met many another trader. At last I was ready. No, there were inoculations to be endured. The Mr. Hyde half of me was working furiously on all this, but the Dr. Jekyll side was equally busy in Hanover Square. The improvised sheik's tent had been all very well. It had been fun, but it was only a makeshift, and I had had enough of it. And some of my clients had, too. In any case I wanted bigger premises again. I made one final use of it when the 'Teen and Twenty' hats were launched. A bus-load of schoolgirls came down to see the hats and were duly photographed by the Press. Perhaps they were a trifle young to be really interested, but I can still see their bright eyes and by no means uncritical looks as they took in the rather faded drapings. So once again the hunt was on.

Massive portals and awe-inspiring halls backed up only by one little slip of a room were presented to me. Mean entrances with spacious inside accommodation. In one building a beautiful staircase nearly caught me, and in another fine panelling.

At last I discovered 84 Brook Street. A marble staircase, the tiniest little lift, and three floors of lovely, airy rooms. And at the very top a roof garden from which one could see Selfridge's, with the flags of the allied nations fluttering in the wind. It seemed a good omen.

The sensible thing seemed now to give up my little Chelsea home and make a flat from part of the third floor at these new premises. So here I was, moving my business

premises, moving my home, and making last-minute preparations for leaving my business and launching out to seduce the New World.

In a cyclone I accomplished the removal of my possessions from Chelsea, personally installed Susie in her new quarters and jumped into a taxi.

America, here I come!

## CHAPTER XIII

THE ship berthed on the far side of New York. How *small* the Statue of Liberty looked through my glasses.

It was late afternoon by the time I had passed through the customs-shed, five hours after the scheduled time. The polyglot mob of passengers, released from the fortuitous bonhomie imposed by five days at sea, now shot off on separate paths like a disintegrating blob of quicksilver. Already the blinds of their individual lives were drawn over their faces. A negro porter wrestled with my luggage.

Then voices. 'Hello. Hello. Hello, Aage! Hullol!'

It was unreal. It was unbelievable. I had written to some of my friends telling them that I was coming to America and here they all were to meet me. Five of them; each with a car, each with plans to whisk me off to their homes, or favourite restaurants.

I fell on their necks; I introduced them. There seemed only one way of dealing with their respective kindness. I suggested that everybody came to my hotel. It was almost like having a presidential escort.

After dinner my friends took me to see Broadway and Times Square. I had been up since six o'clock that morning, but never mind! The electric air of New York was already having its effect. Let's go!

My first American night club I shall never forget. We got there at about two o'clock. Outside it was pitchy black, inside bright with a thousand candlelights. Far, far away in the vastness was a tiny negro singer. In the clearest, loveliest voice came the words of 'Cockles and Mussels', each note like a shimmering coloured bauble shot



into the air. I had not heard anything like it since 1926 when I first heard Florence Mills sing in Paris.

That was my first meeting with New York; a pleasant preliminary amble. But the pace soon changed. The Group's show was to be at the Hotel Pierre, a lovely place in Fifth Avenue, opposite Central Park. It was very chic. It was also very big. Probably there were a hundred floors; I never got to the top.

All the smart people came here; the hotel had simply everything. The ordinary requirements of bed and food seemed almost lost in the multiplicity of other services. You could shop, take a Turkish bath, hold a wedding reception, have your corns cut, or hire a stenographer. I should not have been surprised to learn that they had a resident psychiatrist.

The architecture, so far as ferro-concrete allows, had great beauty; and so had the décor and the lighting. But wandering about in this maze of elegance one sometimes longed for a pair of roller skates. To add to the bewilderment there was always the hazard of the 'moving wall'. Just when you had located and learned to like a particularly charming and intimate little restaurant, the scene-shifters would come along and do their stuff. You might perhaps be knowledgeably piloting a hungry friend luncheonwards. 'It's just round here,' you would say encouragingly, only to find that the frescoed wall of your charming little retreat had disappeared in the vastness of a competition ballroom. Or a book exhibition. It happened during the night as by magic.

Perhaps you want a hair cut; and of course there must, there *must* be a gentlemen's barber somewhere. Luck comes your way and you espy a bellboy. Before he can escape you sail in and ask for the barber's.

'Certainly, sir. Straight through the Louis Seize room, through the Louis Quinze room, turn right and through the Japanese room and past the Sheraton room. It's just opposite the Rococo room by the Vienna room. You're welcome, sir.'

*A pretty girl . . .*



*A twist here. . .*



*A drape of  
chiffon. . .*



*And maybe a  
flower. . .*



Let us try a white ribbon...



And a perky end...



How does that look?...



There you are, madam...



You start off, then decide to let your hair grow like an artist.

My first job as soon as I had tracked down the showroom, and the hats, was to interview some model girls and arrange a rehearsal. I had heard that there were two big model agencies and that all the best model girls came from these two agencies. I went to see them and fixed for half a dozen girls to come along that afternoon to rehearse the show.

I had not bargained for the grandeur of the model fees. Was I, I wondered, hiring six prima donnas? Tch! I was very conscious of the compliment my competitors had paid me in allowing me to present their collections; I must do the best possible for them.

The girls had come a little late for the rehearsal, a little bored-looking, too. But they were certainly very beautiful. They had poise and they were exceedingly well turned out. From the seams in their nylons to the last glittering hair of their curls, each girl shone with grooming. As the last one arrived and disdainfully shed her mink coat, craned her swan-like neck to peer at herself through veils of mascara'd lashes, I wondered if my hats were grand enough for such very *grande* young *dames*. But I was used to the model temperament. The girls would warm up, I decided, when the show was on.

There was, however, one hat in my own collection which had special value, and for which none of these ladies was suitable. They were all too sophisticated. I had brought with me a variation of the little 'going away' hat which I had so recently made for Princess Elizabeth. It was a small blue beret with a little peak and a pom-pom at the side. There would be a great deal of interest in this hat. But it needed a wearer of charm, youth and simplicity. I wanted a 'young lady' type. These agency girls, beautiful though they were, lacked real sweetness. I said nothing and got on with the main part of the rehearsal. But away from the rehearsal room, I was worried.

Next day was the show, and the problem was still not solved. I had been racing back and forth between my own

hotel and the Pierre. The stage décor had been altered, the orchestra's repertoire looked over, the powder room checked, the girls rehearsed, the director of the firm supplying the felts consulted, the electricians placated, the commissariat instructed, the chairs counted. My words learned; and finally my prayers said.

Lunch-time found me taking Schnapps with an English friend who was also 'in' hats in New York. At a nearby table sat an acquaintance of this lady with her daughter, a charming little thing of about seventeen or eighteen years. She had freshness and she had sweetness. Her eyes were candid, her lips soft.

Her face simply shone as though illuminated from within. She was perfect for the job. There was no time to be lost. I got myself introduced. 'Ma'am, could I borrow your daughter for a little while?' My proposal must have seemed rather startling in its baldness. I hurried on explaining I had to have that little girl to model in my show. Then 'Mom', bless her, her consternation turned to smiles, agreed.

We got down to the big showroom at 5.30. Two minutes later the rest of the model girls were out on strike. They dropped their mascara brushes, took off their chiffon head-scarves and curled their long legs over the powder room chairs; lit cigarettes and dropped the ash on the hats. It was unbelievable. It was unbearable!

Well, it was no use cursing. The ghost of my forefathers whispered 'Tact'. Yes! I must find some sort of graceful compromise. 'Would you be so kind, ladies . . .' I said. And went on to propose that I should personally lead the young girl on to the stage and explain her status. With ten minutes to go I managed to win them round.

That show was a success! The hats were new in appeal and perhaps the presentation was a little new, too. But it was the little girl who stole the show. The audience loved her. The trade people wanted to know who she was, and the newspaper men surged round. The photographers

went mad. Only the model girls threw a few disdainful glances, more eloquent than words.

The sequel is a little sad. When I came back to New York a year later, the young girl was no longer so charming, sweet and unspoiled. She was now a professional, as synthetically glamorized as the rest of them; and probably as dictatorial! Doubtless it was all my fault for first introducing her into that hard, glittering world.

They work fast in America. The show had not been over half an hour when the radio boys were after me and I was hustled off for an interview.

'Whad'yer think of American women? How d'yer like their hats?' With no time to work out diplomatic answers the words came tumbling out.

'Nearly as pretty as other women.'

'Hats? Fun on young people. Frightful after fifty. Ghastly after sixty.'

And then I added, 'In England a woman faces her age and learns to wear a hat with dignity. In France she dyes her hair blue and her hat black. In America she just pushes her hat further back and hopes for the best.' The interviewers nearly died. But, say what you like, the Americans can take it—for me it was good publicity.

The show, and the Group's business over, I decided to stay on in New York for a while. There were a lot of old friends to look up in New York. And I had got the prevailing fever now. Never a moment must be idle.

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hotel and the Pierre. The stage décor had been altered, the orchestra's repertoire looked over, the powder room checked, the girls rehearsed, the director of the firm supplying the felts consulted, the electricians placated, the commissariat instructed, the chairs counted. My words learned; and finally my prayers said.

Lunch-time found me taking Schnapps with an English friend who was also 'in' hats in New York. At a nearby table sat an acquaintance of this lady with her daughter, a charming little thing of about seventeen or eighteen years. She had freshness and she had sweetness. Her eyes were candid, her lips soft.

Her face simply shone as though illuminated from within. She was perfect for the job. There was no time to be lost. I got myself introduced. 'Ma'am, could I borrow your daughter for a little while?' My proposal must have seemed rather startling in its baldness. I hurried on explaining I had to have that little girl to model in my show. Then 'Mom', bless her, her consternation turned to smiles, agreed.

We got down to the big showroom at 5.30. Two minutes later the rest of the model girls were out on strike. They dropped their mascara brushes, took off their chiffon head-scarves and curled their long legs over the powder room chairs; lit cigarettes and dropped the ash on the hats. It was unbelievable. It was unbearable!

Well, it was no use cursing. The ghost of my forefathers whispered 'Tact'. Yes! I must find some sort of graceful compromise. 'Would you be so kind, ladies . . .' I said. And went on to propose that I should personally lead the young girl on to the stage and explain her status. With ten minutes to go I managed to win them round.

That show was a success! The hats were new in appeal and perhaps the presentation was a little new, too. But it was the little girl who stole the show. The audience loved her. The trade people wanted to know who she was, and the newspaper men surged round. The photographers

went mad. Only the model girls threw a few disdainful glances, more eloquent than words.

The sequel is a little sad. When I came back to New York a year later, the young girl was no longer so charming, sweet and unspoiled. She was now a professional, as synthetically glamorized as the rest of them; and probably as dictatorial! Doubtless it was all my fault for first introducing her into that hard, glittering world.

They work fast in America. The show had not been over half an hour when the radio boys were after me and I was hustled off for an interview.

'Whad'yer think of American women? How d'yer like their hats?' With no time to work out diplomatic answers the words came tumbling out.

'Nearly as pretty as other women.'

'Hats? Fun on young people. Frightful after fifty. Ghastly after sixty.'

And then I added, 'In England a woman faces her age and learns to wear a hat with dignity. In France she dyes her hair blue and her hat black. In America she just pushes her hat further back and hopes for the best.' The interviewers nearly died. But, say what you like, the Americans can take it—for me it was good publicity.

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that the charming Mrs. Alison Settle had given up the editorship of *Vogue*, and a young American was taking over.

'If I were editor of *Vogue*, I would do this, and I would do that. . . .' A pat on my shoulder had brought my house of cards tumbling. 'I'm Elizabeth Penrose, the new editor. I wonder if you would have lunch with me one day?'

I went, not to lunch but to dinner one evening in Miss Penrose's little flat in South Audley Street. She was friendly and kind and forgiving. Over the meal we expounded new ideas and over the washing-up disposed of old ones. Then, since we were both in a foreign country, we talked of our home lands. 'There must be something wrong with my glands,' Miss Penrose had said. 'I never feel homesick.'

But now Miss Penrose was back in America. Had her glands caught up?

The new flat was just by Central Park. A shining negro maid with a flashing white grin opened the door. Inside was a typical modern, open-plan apartment with one huge main room. But the décor was startlingly different. Walls, ceiling and curtains were all white, a deep plum-coloured carpet on the floor. No pictures, no ornaments. Only a few low settees sprinkled with soft chartreuse, emerald and pink cushions and some low chairs. It was the long wall of the room that fixed the attention. Studded over it at regular intervals were delicate plaster hands each holding a candle. It looked enchanting from the side of the room where the shadows were unexplored. From under the blaze of light the other side became alive with moving shadows.

I was seated on a couch next to a lady whose name I had not caught. She was wrapped almost to the eyes in leopard skin. 'I've heard of you,' she said, disturbingly. Before I could inquire further we were interrupted, the party got going and the guests moved round. Miss Penrose, as ever, was bubbling over with ideas. At one in the morning I found myself making my adieus at the same moment as the Lady-in-Leopard, and being offered a lift in her car. 'Perhaps you would like to see my showrooms?' she said. 'My card.'

The car was upholstered in leopard, and the foot-muff matched. When the chauffeur stopped outside my hotel and I had bowed, I took a peep at the card in my hand: Miss Elizabeth Arden!

I called on Miss Arden next day and she took me round her premises, showing me every process. What respect her petite and elegant figure commanded. Typists stiffened, the beauty girls seemed somehow to emanate even a shade more smooth comeliness. It was a marathon tour by the time we had finished and despite the handsome lunch afterwards I was rather jaded. Not Miss Arden; she was as erect, as fresh as ever. Miss Arden, I decided, was made of iron. Or, perhaps, stainless steel!

I was staying at the lovely Gotham Hotel. I had engaged a suite of rooms, thinking that it would be a good idea to have a little Press party of my own, and see if I could do some business. I gave the party, the Press said nice things about the model hats, but few came to buy. My dollars were running out so I went to the management and asked for a cheap room at the top of the hotel.

It was nearly Christmas time, the snow was falling and from the heights of my new little room I could see clear across to the Rockefeller Centre. The scene glittered like a spangled Christmas card. Beneath my window, the bells of St. Patrick rang out the hours. It was enchanting; far, far nicer than the expensive suite I had vacated. But it was hardly suitable for showing hats. This was not India!

I tackled the management again and they agreed that I might hire the big suite for a couple of hours whenever I wanted. *Hat Box and Hat Cox*, it was certainly farcical. The telephone would ring and an appointment be made to see my hats. As soon as the line was clear I would speak to the management, then race down with flowers. Up again for hats, sketches and shapes. Down again. Up again when the callers had gone. Back again for another appointment.

I decided this was getting me nowhere. I had an invitation to call on one of the big manufacturers in New York.

As in most cities, New York has a 'hat' centre. It lies around 36th Street and 37th Street, and to get to it is rather like going to a dreamworld military wedding. The shafts of steam from the hat factories shoot up and spread across from either side of the street, forming an arch like a line of huge sabres held aloft.

I walked under the arch sniffing familiar odours, showed my card and shot up in the lift.

The old gentleman at the head of the firm was sympathetic. What would I like to do? 'I should like a job,' I said. 'I should like the opportunity of going through every department and seeing how you do things here. Afterwards I will make you a collection. Just one special favour—no one but yourself should know who I am.'

It was the sort of proposition that an American likes. 'Go ahead,' I was told. So for the next few weeks I lost my identity from nine to six, clocking on as punctually as the rest, chaffing the lift boy on the way in and getting a cheerful 'bye' every night.

I worked right through the different departments. The mass-producing methods were inspiring; the artistry less appealing, particularly in the assembly of hat and trimming. But, then, it was all done at high speed.

Bless him, at the end of six weeks and with a collection to show, an important customer came in and pronounced judgement on my work.

'Boy,' he said, 'you've got it on the ball.'

It was the first time I had heard the expression, and even then I did not accurately know its meaning. But I could guess that it was favourable. Mr. Wilson represented the big firm of Carson, Pirie & Scott of Chicago. He was enthusiastic and forthwith invited me to show my hats in his store.

This could be a big thing, so I hurried round making my arrangements. The day came when I had to get to Pennsylvania station. The snow was still falling and the streets almost impassable. The taxis had stopped running and I had a dozen big hat-boxes besides my personal luggage.

From my workplace in 37th Street two little negro boys volunteered to help. They borrowed a wheelbarrow and with my suitcases and hat-boxes piled high we all three shuffled off through the snow, their black faces gleaming in that so apposite setting.

Since childhood I had loved all forms of travel. Since I had grown up I had looked with more than ordinary interest at pictures of the modern American rail-car. The half-section drawings showing the passengers disporting themselves so comfortably irresistibly drew me. Even allowing for the artist's exaggeration, it looked tantalizing. The comfortable chairs, the smart drapery, the attentive steward. Now was my chance.

My ticket purchased, luggage put aboard and negro boys dispatched, I went along to my compartment. It was in no way disappointing. The bed was there, the armchair and the little table with the standard lamp.

With a whistle the train slid out, the sounds from outside the station rather muffled by the deep snow. The train was warm, the menu promised excellence. I rang for a waiter and ordered a highball. Then I loosened my tie and collar, slipped off my shoes, put on some travelling slippers and prowled round investigating the spacious comfort. I would just try the bed.

The excellent dinner, the comfortable sitting-room and the thrill of that journey right across the Middle West! I should of course be recounting a most agreeable experience, but the fact is that the next thing I knew was that the train was in Chicago. Thump, thump thump. Mr. Thaarup. Mr. Thaarup. Mr. THAARUP.

A sleepy Mr. T. opened his eyes to daylight and his ears to an urgent voice outside the compartment. A tow-headed young man, a symphony in camel-hair, and a little dark-haired pixie of a woman stood there.

'It's O.K., Mr. Thaarup. We're the press agents for Carson, Pirie & Scott. We just wanna short interview. But we gotta get cracking. We got Miss Mary Pickford on the train, too. So if you'll come along.'

Somehow I managed to make a few appropriate remarks. Miss Pickford, better organized and wider awake than I, filled in the awkward breaks. The interview over, we shook hands again. More smiles, more handshakes.

The most immediately desirable thing now was a bath, a change and breakfast. But the 'camel-hair' had other arrangements. Into a taxi we all bundled, 'Pixie' explaining laconically, 'Another broadcast. For the housewife,' she added. A script was pushed into my hand. 'You start here. Tell them about your hats and don't forget to remind them that your show is on this morning. We'll take care of the rest,' she added.

The prophecy in those last words! At the broadcasting station, introductions over, Camel-hair and Pixie loped off with a simple 'Be seeing you'. But their disappearance, as I later discovered, was not made with any intention of idling the hours away.

I had faced the microphone often enough but never before on a sponsored programme. The compère rattled over his words, exhorting the housewife to make a good breakfast. Perhaps somebody's Super Succulent Sausages were the message. I joined in describing a few hats and urging the housewife to hurry with the washing-up and to come along to the show at eleven.

Not much time for personal reflection, but I could not escape a few random thoughts. The wheels within wheels that had propelled me forward thus to press on the innocent housewife these Crumbier Crumpets or Nibbler Niblets—whatever it was that morning. And without my having even tasted the darned things!

I dashed to my hotel after the broadcast. Pixie and Camel-hair had been working away at things. Flowers in my room, my luggage unpacked, shirts hung up, shaving gear laid out and a hot bath ready. At one side a poached egg on toast.

'You got fifteen minutes,' said the young man. 'Then I'll take you down to the store and introduce you to the heads of the departments. We'd like you

to give a short talk to the staff. Your show starts at eleven.'

The store was unbelievably large, the hat department the biggest I had ever seen. Divided into sub-departments there were possibly five thousand hats on display every day. Hats for grandmothers, for babies, for widows, for young brides. Hats for stolen sweethearts, for discarded sweethearts. Hats to assuage almost every feminine feeling.

A pep talk to a staff of such a mammoth undertaking! What on earth could I say? 'It's the customer. . . .' I started as gaily as I could. And then the thing unwound. It was just what I might have told my own showroom staff. The principles were the same ' . . . not a sale for the sake of a sale but a sale . . . ' and so on.

At no later than eleven-five the show proper started; not bad for the fourth engagement of the morning. It was routine, yet for me, it was different. Five hundred American faces stared up at me. Faces as madly mixed in cast of features as any audience in the world. Curiously, though, there was a certain sameness. The even make-up, the plucked eyebrows. I love a chance to improvise. Here was a chance to dig in with a few rousing remarks on individuality.

Only at the end a diabolical thought trespassed. The American woman likes to look the 'same'. The case of the Little Apple 'teenage hat which sold one million times proves that. Some of the wearers must have been pretty ageing kittens!

But the ladies seemed interested, clapped and applauded and stayed to buy hats.

Pixie was temporarily missing after the show, but the young man was still on duty, his camel-hair now shed but still recognizable by his tow head. With lunch over, I was told that I had twenty minutes free. What would I like to do, before the afternoon show began?

Across the road from Carson, Pirie & Scott was the rival firm of Marshall Fields; equally large and grand. I asked if it could be arranged for me to look round Marshall Fields. They were good sports and they saw the funny

side of my request. They telephoned across and with equal sportsmanship a representative came to meet me and pilot me round for a quick rubber-necking tour.

Back in the store for another two shows in quick succession. Afterwards, a Press dinner. Pixie was back on duty now and swept me off for another broadcast, delivering back a rather limp me just in time for a supper party given by the management of this so go-ahead store. Or was it the Press agency that was so go-ahead! Either way, as far as I was concerned, that was Chicago!

As I settled down in the train that was to take me back to New York next morning two reporters trundled up. As the train oozed its way along the platform they yelled, 'Whad'yer think of Chicago?' Sticking my head out of the window, I yelled back, 'I ain't seen nothing.'

Could I have done a little crystal-gazing at that moment I might have reserved the expression for an even more flippant use a little later on. A telephone call had come through to me in Chicago asking me to be a guest on another sponsored programme in New York; a programme organized for a woman's lunch club. It was a very popular programme, I was told, so I prepared to team up for it.

This programme was run by two very able people, the story went. Lunch cost two dollars and there were cartloads of gifts for successful quiz answerers. A couple of guests were thrown in just as make-weight. To call this programme popular was to use the palest of words. Here was a fanatical turn-out, as near hysterical as any 'hot-gospel' following. I arrived at the restaurant with my boxes; the model girls had gone ahead. Outside the restaurant a bulging queue of assorted women pressed; craning heads to assess the chance of getting in. Smart matrons, ageing spinsters, short, over-plump parties made even more awkwardly large with fashion baskets and bags; long lean gum-chewers. Raddled old girls pressing and craning as eagerly as the rest.

Here it seemed was the mecca of women from the whole State of New York. Car loads, coach loads and train loads

of them. Inside the restaurant the tables were more than amply filled; a spill-over was jam packed round the wall.

I fought my way to the stage and introduced myself to the two hypnotists sitting there; a large well-muscled and handsome gentleman in a light suit with a very loud tie and a lady who I had heard was on the short-list of America's best-dressed women. The lady certainly wore plenty of everything; tweeds, diamonds and more diamonds. She was boldly handsome and quite evidently capable.

A brief reconnaissance of hats, model girls and the 'spot' allotted to me on the programme was all I had time for. And that was all these competent, confident two people required. 'We'll make it up as we go,' explained the muscled gent. The familiar phrase popped out—'We'll take care of it.' A glass of rye was pushed in front of me.

The model girls had got my hats; there I was stuck at the platform table with the microphones and a glass of rye. Through the flare of the stage lights I could see the audience, spooning up its tomato soup and forking its fried chicken. Some of them waiting to eat the next course; and the next course was *me*.

The red light for 'Go' came on. And simultaneously the two compères.

'Good morning, Mary.' 'Good morning, John.' 'Lovely morning, Mary.' 'Lovely morning.' 'Well, no wonder it's a lovely morning; I took "X" salts this morning. It's a wonderful morning and I feel wonderful. I feel the freshest ever. I brushed my teeth with "Y" paste this morning. You look wonderful today, Mary, too. Why is it?'

'Well, I'm happy because I started the day right too. "Purple" prunes for breakfast. "Purple" prunes are the perfect food. They're the palatable way to new prettiness. And then I'm happy, John, for another reason. *I'm* happy because I love hats, and *today* we have here a very famous milliner, and he is going to show us his latest hats and to tell us about his first visit to America . . . MR. AAGE THAARUP!'



There had been no time for rehearsal and sometimes my name was Aggie, sometimes Eggie, Oggie and Argie, too. Anything went in that fantastic spate of cozening cupidity.

Compared to this plethora of hyperbole my words dropped limp as lame ducks. 'Well, one of my latest hats is . . . or my latest colour is pale blue . . . or a beautiful yellow. And of course I always like yellow combined with black . . .'

'Ah, black,' chipped in the tweed lady, her diamonds temporarily mute with the sad meditativenss of her actions. 'Black, now what about black? Black is right for a funeral service. And who are the best morticians? "ABC" can give you a service which will do credit to your *Nearest and Dearest* . . . Gabble, gabble, gabble . . .'

'Here is a little creation in oatmeal. . . ' 'OATMEAL. Why, the most *famous* and the best *cereal* . . .'

But I had still not seen all. The quiz was next.

'Has any lady here got cross-eyes?'

'Has any lady here been unfaithful to her husband this week?'

Whoever could fill out the proposition most fully got the prize. And with what glee the ladies fought so to do. I had never seen group frenzy like this.

My co-guest on the stage was a lady from Hollywood. We crept off together and pushed our way to the cool outside. 'I'll try anything once,' she said, waving good-bye!

High-powered sales talk was everywhere. The glint of go-getting in every eye and the word 'efficiency' lurked round every street corner. I wanted to see and learn all I could about it. There was one store with a great reputation; I asked for an appointment to meet the boss. He was interested in a hat proposition and a conference was called. The heads of the millinery department, the advertising manager, the sales manager, the personnel manager and the window manager were all to be there. And me.

The conference went swimmingly. 'Thank you, Mr. Thaarup. Thank you for giving your time; most interesting, most interesting. If you will call next Friday.' A quick

check-up that everybody present was free for next Friday. Good-byes. Bows. Everything beautiful, just wonderful.

Friday, and I present myself as arranged. Two aloof 'film stars' banging away on typewriters in the outer room try painfully to recall having seen me before. Diaries are consulted, and a light breaks through. I get to the managerial office.

'Of course, Mr. Thaarup, of course. Have a cigar, Mr. Thaarup! Call up Sales, Miss, and get the others along.' The President is all affability as he sets the motors running. Now we shall see the way to do things, think I. One telephone under the chin, another under the armpit, a couple more on the desk. 'Wassat? Whosat?'

It turns out that 'Sales' got the sack at the beginning of the week, and as he was the king-pin in our beautifully concerted plan another meeting must be called for next Toosday.

Tuesday comes and I am all prepared. The film stars are quite cosily chummy this time. They know all about it and start work with the telephones right away. Unhappily it is 'Styles' who has had the sack this time.

I bet if I went back the following week the President himself would be missing. I gave up. But I had learned such a lot in 36th Street.

I made one more call at a store whose London agents had often bought my hats. I had an idea that one of the 'big shots' was an old friend from my days in Paris. The day of my appointment was windy and my hair was blowing, as the Americans say, every which way. Criminal confession, *I had no hat!* I never do wear hats, only sell them. But the day and the circumstances called for a hat. I stopped at the fourth floor to buy one. It was really a very beautiful hat department. Snap-brimmed hats, bowlers, caps, tweed hats. Fishing hats, boating hats and berets. The American male is less inhibited than the European.

'I want a brown snap-brimmed hat, seven and three-quarters, please.' The young assistant brought me the hat, holding it aloft so that it came sailing down the room like

a little ship. The assistant went through the prescribed gestures. The dent down the centre, the pinch over the two folds. I rescued the hat and put it on my head. The head size was right but the brim far too big.

'Would you kindly get me a pair of scissors.'

The assistant paled a little, protesting that he had no scissors. But I paid the bill and the scissors were brought. I trimmed down the brim, put the hat on my head and went, leaving behind me a stunned silence.

On the seventh floor I waited four or five minutes before getting in to see my man. 'I thought it must be you,' were his first words. 'I had just heard that there was a madman in the building cutting up hats.'

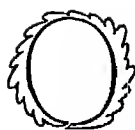
New York, for all its rather amusing hustle, I loved—Wall Street, on a Sunday afternoon, terrifically moving; my view from Fifth Avenue over the Rockefeller Centre, awe-inspiring. The quiet magic of the Hudson river seen by night. And the wonder of the great ships arriving almost in the heart of the city. But I was ready to go home now. One grand party to say good-bye to everybody, and then a 'plane to England.

Lovely, lovely to have been to America, but back in London I nearly kissed the ground. Just to walk across Grosvenor Square was bliss. Even the old bombed sites seemed to give a familiar welcome.

My new premises in Brook Street, now freshly painted, looked inviting. I climbed the last few stairs to my tiny flat at the top with real happiness in my heart. Down the stairs to meet me came Susie and, tumbling after her, three new little balls of fur and whisker.

I had been away long enough.

## CHAPTER XIV



ONE hat which I was very soon to make is to me the most exciting hat I have ever created. A hat which it was not only a great honour to be asked to make but which, by its use on an unique royal occasion, helped to make history.

It was a spring morning in 1950 when I was summoned to Buckingham Palace. The Queen, then Princess Elizabeth, was to deputize for King George at the Trooping the Colour. The Princess was to wear her uniform of Colonel-in-Chief of the Guards with the skirt cut for side-saddle. By tradition the appropriate hat would be a bearskin. The War Office, with proper pride in regimental correctness, rather insisted that bearskin was the right thing and there was no alternative.

That towering edifice of hide, fur and bamboo is something under which even the strongest, most seasoned Guardsman has been known to wilt. Obviously, for a young girl it had to be modified somehow.

‘Could it be made half size?’

No, it just was not practical. The heat and the weight of it would still be excessive. With the King’s permission to break away from the bearskin idea, I went round the Palace poring over all the prints I could find, hoping for some inspiration. It seemed to me that what I had to make was a hat that incorporated some recognizable bit of tradition but at the same time was comfortable enough to wear during what must in any case be a quite severe trial of strength. It had to have dignity; it had to have elegance. It had to have a military—nay, a Guards air.

I flew to Paris. An idea was working in me. There must be someone who could make a material that simulated bearskin. Long-haired, but really light of weight.

I had decided that a tricorne was the thing. The tricorne has always been held in high regard as military head-gear, as can be seen from any illustrated history book. This tricorne was to have curves gently softened by the 'bearskin' material, the crown just high enough to give balance to the long line of the side-saddle habit.

I had the material made; I experimented with spartra shapes, steaming and discarding until I was satisfied. When the hat was made I took it to Clarence House for the Princess's approval. The lines were right, the fit was right, but I still had to find some decorative way of mounting the regimental badge.

I thought first of a cockade, then of a white osprey, and here Lord Mountbatten came to my rescue. He had, he said, a white plume inherited from one of his ancestors, which had been worn in battle.

The plume was brought to me, a little bit of history, in a narrow metal case. I tried it; it was just the thing except that it was a little too long, so I found another, rather smaller, and fitted that to the hat.

I had been asked to take the hat to Buckingham Palace for a dress rehearsal. In the court-yard of the Royal Stables grooms waited, a saddled horse champed. A car drew up and out stepped Princess Elizabeth and her maid, the Princess breath-taking in her scarlet and navy uniform. The hat was put on, and to ensure that my little creation really satisfied the eye from all angles a film was taken.

Finally came the fitting in the King's study in Buckingham Palace. It was a Saturday morning and I can still remember the still air, the spring sky palely blue.

I passed along the long corridors to the King's apartments. In the study, in front of the fireplace, stood a life-sized stuffed horse, bridled and saddled. Princess Elizabeth, again wearing her uniform but this time with full regalia,

medals and the Order of the Garter—and my hat—mounted the 'horse'.

H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth asked me to let His Majesty know that she was ready. When the King came in he walked round the 'horse' looking at the hat from all angles. And then, turning to me, remarked that it was not at all what he had expected.

'I know, Your Majesty,' I replied. And then ventured, 'But don't you think it's rather nice?' The King nodded. And I knew that he was satisfied.

Although this tricorné was not the first hat that I had made for Princess Elizabeth, and I was to make many more, I still think that to have been asked to make it on what was a great historical occasion was the greatest compliment of my career.

Looking at the hat again at successive Trooping the Colour Ceremonies, worn not by a Princess but by a Queen with all the responsibilities of State, I am always impressed by the grace and dignity with which she wears the hat. And if I go to the cinema, when I stand to attention with everybody else I am awed by the Queen's gentle womanly smile beneath my adaptation of a traditionally military emblem.

I had come back from America effervescing and sparkling with ideas. Spring was not quite here yet, but the crocuses were peeping through. There was a little bit of warmth in the wind and a great deal of warmth in the welcome of my staff and friends. And my dear, plump, purring Susie.

I had learnt a lot about making hats the quick American way although not so much about design. But there were signs that in Europe fashion, which had so long been asleep, was now awake again. I looked round my new stockroom and wished I had a dozen pairs of hands.

From Mayfair to the Outer Hebrides there beckoned a thousand hatless heads. An endless panorama of hats unrolled in my mind. In my model hat department there would be hats which would be the very key to the door of

the soul. For my 'Teen and Twenty' an endless vista of youth and charm stretched before me.

I got down to work and was happy. There is nothing quite so satisfying as the feeling of being in the grip of a creative force. Though one might never reach the ultimate of one's vision the going was good. Perhaps, as the saying goes, the best part is the getting there.

Eighty-four Brook Street had very special charm. It was a lovely old house with tall, well-proportioned rooms. There was a beautiful marble staircase with a wrought-iron banister, topped with smooth Honduras mahogany. Crystal chandeliers shimmered everywhere; a tiny lift led up to the second floor. Above that was my eyrie, a bed-sitter, a kitchen, a bathroom and a little roof garden. Everything was freshly painted, the carpets were new and I felt glad to have left behind me the improvisations of the post-war period. The twin gods of comfort and prosperity smiled. I was very content.

The main trend in hat styles was off-the-face. It presaged shorter hair and the death of buns and plaits, except for a rare few. There were elaborate berets, pulled and crushed into lovely, becoming lines. There were asymmetrical draped hats swinging to the side, halo hats with soft feathers at either cheek, but all boldly and determinedly showing the hair line. And there were bonnets; an immense variety of bonnets, from the demurely Puritan to the rose-decked.

It was a happy coincidence for me that I was now making many hats for the beautiful young Princess Margaret. At the same time these young bonnet styles were supremely suitable for my 'Teen and Twenty' range, which had now begun to command a big following.

The public had suddenly become very aware of the young Princess Margaret's extraordinary feeling for good fashion. Overnight she became a leader of young fashion. Taking note were not only the little 'Madames' of the West End's back streets, but also the big wholesale manufacturers. It was astonishing how quickly a little hat or a velvet coat could

be translated for the off-the-peg market, put into production and in the shop window, all in a flash.

That hideous legacy of the war, wide, square shoulders, probably the ugliest fashion of the century, was still with us. Even the most discerning retail manufacturers have blind spots. Dior had suggested that women have lovely shoulders, that it is good for a man to look manly, and a woman to look womanly. But the manufacturers turned down the idea with the cogent argument that the public would not buy the new sloping line.

It is my belief that Princess Margaret did more than any one person to dispel this bogey. Her petite figure was one of the first to be seen with this new line. The truth of its beauty was immediately apparent. In a trice one of the toughest of fashion battles ended in a complete rout. Look back, ladies, and try to remember the horror of those huge, hulking and monstrous shoulders, like female 'pugs'.

Speaking of plagiarism, I remember one particular hat which I made for Princess Margaret at the end of that year. As chairman of the Associated Millinery Designers, to which Princess Elizabeth had so graciously given her patronage, I sought for the occasion of another show the honour of Princess Margaret's presence.

The show was again at the Dorchester Hotel. Princess Margaret was still in her 'teens, and the surprise of the evening was her appearance inestimably chic in black. I had made her a little hat trimmed with ermine tails. Her appearance at a hat show in this particular hat was the signal for ermine tails, real and improvised, to sprout and dangle from a thousand hats, and all within a week!

My little lift in Brook Street was perhaps the tiniest in London. It was really minute. But how many charming and important ladies found their way via this tiny lift to my second-floor salons! One of the first was Mrs. (now Lady) Churchill, for whom it had always been a very great pleasure to make hats.



Whether during my early years or in those when I had 'arrived', it has always been my practice to work on Saturdays. The exigencies of my business have seemed to need this, but perhaps subconscious memory played a part. In Denmark we always worked on Saturday.

Lady Churchill proposed one day that she should come along to my salon on Saturday mornings. Her engagements were so numerous that this was the only convenient time. Moreover, my salon would be peaceful. For a while this worked very well. Then, Lady Churchill's time becoming even more occupied, she asked one day if I would bring her hats to Downing Street. What a thrill it was, actually to stand on the other side of that famous portal, 'No. 10', and to mount the stairs to the third floor. Rufus was there, excited and interested in my boxes.

Lady Churchill always wore her hats with very great grace. She was one of the few of my customers who had that 'something' in her finger-tips, the power, the alchemy, to push or pull a scrap of a hat and transform it into individual chic.

The room to which I was shown had the same powerfully personal touch about it—the way the flowers were arranged, even the organdie curtains. I lifted one of the curtains whilst I was waiting and looked down on the Horse Guards Parade. It was a terrifically windy day. The dry leaves from St. James's Park and the Green Park were being hurled and smacked about as if by a playful devil.

Looking down, I saw two little schoolboys of perhaps nine and eleven years, their striped caps pulled down over their foreheads, their striped mufflers streaming out behind. With their arms round each other's shoulders they were pressing and leaning against the wind. The leaves beat against their pink faces and their bare pink knees; the wind fought against any progress. The two little figures contested gallantly. It touched my heart, symbolizing, for a moment, humanity's struggle against all the forces of adversity.

Lady Churchill came in and wished me 'Good morning', and stood with me at the window for a moment remarking

on the beauty of the view. 'Indeed, it is beautiful,' I said. 'Look at those two little schoolboys fighting so gamely; it makes me feel I know what it is to be British.'

'Not bad for a Dane,' said a voice behind me, a voice that was completely familiar though I had never before had the honour of meeting its owner. Sir Winston himself.

*Panache.* The striped beauty of a feather, the exotic in flower or silk; the hat that made an impact. That was what another customer wanted. She was the wife of the editor of a Sunday newspaper and loved lunching out. At the 'Ivy', where Fleet Street, bookish types and stage hobnobbed on first-name terms and where a hat could be guaranteed to provoke. Or the Savoy, less intimate but not bad for making a good entry.

This was a lady, not young but very much alive, whose hats illustrated this fact. She loved the original, and she wore it with splendid purpose, almost as a badge of independence and individuality. The husband was a genial chap. He was well used to the bold attack his charming wife made on old shibboleths, and I fancy rather enjoyed it. He had a sense of humour and wit into the bargain, as I discovered when he paid one particular bill.

It was for a hat which I had made as a present from the husband to the wife, celebrating some anniversary. It was rather special, with a wonderful sweep of kingfisher feathers. The estimate had been for X guineas, but because the lady had decided on a rather more extravagant use of the feathers than I had at first visualized, the bill rose by two or three guineas.

The bill was sent in and, when the cheque came, it was accompanied by a note from the husband. He wrote, 'I see that kingfishers are getting bigger and bigger bills.'

Designing a hat for the stage can be very satisfying, though in a different way from when the hat is worn for more intimate appraisal. The immediate effect of the colour of the hat against the colour of the eyes or the lips will be lost, but one can plunge on the more general effect. And on the size, too.

Robert Nesbitt, producing *Fine Feathers* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, asked me to make some hats. His idea was to bring on five tall models all 'dressed up'. The hats would be an important part of their dress.

I decided on five huge cartwheels. They were lovely hats, just right for the mannequins' height, and very elegant, the sort of hats that would have looked perfect at Ascot—on the perfect day. The brims were flat but not hard, a subtle difference. Each turn of the head would give a small but significant change of sweep. The hats finished, the problem was how to get them to the theatre, for they were bigger than any box. We finally wrapped and pinned them in layer upon layer of paper. Without meaning disrespect, I am afraid they looked rather like gigantic wreaths—the sort that come from a foreign potentate or at least the head of a Government department.

Each new season now brought bigger and bigger orders for my 'Teen and Twenty' hats. It meant a lot of work. I was now designing one collection for my model department and another for the 'Teen and Twenty', to be mass-produced at Luton. The appeal of these latter was wider than could have been anticipated. A telephone call from a buyer told of a distressed customer aged forty years or so. She was the sort of woman for whom a simple hat was right, and she had bought more than one hat from the 'T. and T.' range. Thoughtlessly leaving one of these lying about in her home, her schoolboy son and a friend had picked it up. They saw the label, and laughed uproariously! Mother, not surprisingly, was a bit embarrassed. I took the hint and inaugurated another range, calling it 'Twenty Plus'.

My staff grew and, of course, my wages' bill grew. Lighting, cleaning, heating, decorating, printing, packing went up. Flowers went up. My turnover went up and up, and the mythical yet savagely real character of Nat Gubbins's imagination put up his demands too. 'Mr. Bloodsucker' took his whack. The thing that interested the public was that the price of a model hat was now up to at least fifteen guineas.

There was a control of profits order, and I neither drank nor bathed in champagne, nor yet kept a harem. My tastes were quite simple. Travel I adored for itself, and for the necessary relaxation and renewal of creative force; also for temporary respite from the passions and hurricanes that from time to time inevitably sweep through such a business as mine. Temperamental model girls, temperamental sales girls and temperamental customers are the best sort to have. But together they, and a temperamental me, make the ingredients of a volcano.

I had set my hand so many years before to hat-making. Looking back, I believe that such talents as I have could equally well have found other forms of expression. But as it was, they were canalized in hat-making. And I dreamed of hats. To be able, with one's own hands, to change dreams into reality was satisfying work. And a man must work.

But by the end of 1950 I was tired. I had built my business once, and, the war ended, I had had to build it a second time. I decided to go to Italy for a holiday. Only once before had I been there, on my indigent way home from India when I had so gratefully eaten the salami and sipped the wine from the lunch baskets of the nuns.

I flew to Paris and from there on to Milan. Astonishingly, I was the only passenger. A svelte, smooth-skinned stewardess, gleaming with health, and the crew kept me company. It was nearly Christmas, and the uniqueness of a single passenger promoted more than usual friendliness. I went forward to see the controls and to have Mont Blanc pointed out to me. Its snowy caps, interspersed with grey, slaty granite, looked formidable enough if one stopped to contemplate the possibility of disaster.

But, though no disaster came, the snow was bad enough to make it necessary to land at a small military aerodrome some few miles out of Milan. I had begun to realize half-way through the trip that I was developing a very nasty cold. My temperature was rising. The Alps, the cold and this new discomfort of landing several miles from my hotel combined to build up a nightmarish synthesis.

I shuffled and snuffled my way across the snow to the drear aerodrome, fumbled for my passport and handed it to the waiting *carabinieri*. His brown eyes pored over the passport, then suddenly shot at me a piercing glance of only too easily read condemnation. My secretary, it seemed, had omitted to get me a visa. I was not entitled to land in Italy and from the first tumultuous outburst it seemed clear that I was to be deported forthwith, cold, temperature and the nearness of Christmas notwithstanding.

They handcuffed me to a soldier and put us both in a military car. Over the snow we bumped, slowing every now and again with spinning wheels and racing engine. My soldier *alter ego* consoled himself by chain-smoking the whole journey from my little store of cigarettes.

We got to Police Headquarters. My passport was quite unacceptable. This time the verdict was backed up by a formidable peak-capped officer with a nasty bulging holster at his waist. Round the corner I had no doubt was a dreadful little cell into which I was to be thrown.

But the Italians are a little like the French in this. Their bark can be exceedingly terrifying. In inverse ratio, the sudden crumbling of their wrath can be as devastating. From the fate of being arrested I was as suddenly transferred to the status of a V.I.P. In no time I found myself at my hotel, thankful to climb between the sheets with a hot-water bottle, half a dozen handkerchiefs under my pillow.

The hotel was big, old-fashioned. Gilt mirrors embellished hall and bedroom alike. Red plush everywhere, a trifle threadbare. A marble bust or nude figure seemed to give some verisimilitude to the claim that the hotel had central heating.

I woke next morning to the knowledge that I was faced with three days in bed. I rang the bell for coffee. A dreary old man answered my summons and a dusty old maid executed my order. I lay there morose and sorry for myself. What I needed was a bit of cossetting, I told myself. With the power born of desperation I sat up, seized the improbable-looking instrument masquerading as a telephone and,

calling hoarsely down it, desired to speak to the manager. All right then, the assistant manager. *Presto, signor!*

'I am going to be ill for three days,' I croaked. 'I don't think I shall die on you, but I do need some extra comfort.' And I appealed to him. Could he not find someone a bit cheerful to look after me? I was depressed!

With Latin understanding, the assistant manager got busy. A tap on my door and a young and buxom girl, flashing of eyes and teeth, popped her head round the door. Shadowing her was a young man, her young man, I decided, with the shape of a Greek god. Slim as a rod from the hips down, wide and muscled above. Just to look at these two as they dusted, fixed the shutters and the Venetian blinds, organized a table for my tray, was to feel cheered. But the real magic was in the fact that the two were as happy together as a pair of courting swallows. I got better in two days.

Soon I took a 'plane to Rome, and once again was the only passenger aboard. I wondered why Fate was singling me out like this. The journey was certainly bumpy; but the sky was blue and cloudless over Rome, as a taxi took me to my hotel high up in the Pincio Gardens.

Wonderful to be in Rome again! I remembered now that I had thrown a coin in the fountain when I had been here before. It meant I was bound to return and here I was. I walked through the back streets, up and up to the ruins of the Colosseum. The sun was shining just as I had seen it before, showing half of the walls bright terra-cotta and the other grey and mossy. Impossible not to stand and stare and to wonder. To mourn and to be glad. I thought of the gladiatorial splendour and tragedy, the high concept of the architecture and its base uses. I chipped off a pea-sized bit of cement, reflecting on its vast age; the generations that had since marched up and gone their way. For a moment I seemed to probe to the core of things. Of a sudden I felt cold; a pale moon rose in the still day-time sky, carrying my thoughts forward into limitless space.

Hats were a millennium away!

No such rambling thoughts pursued me as I ate, Italian fashion, at one of those bars where one could point and choose from an endless array of good things to eat; all fixed to tempt as much by appearance as by aroma. The prawns were pink and the ham pinker. The hors-d'œuvres diverse with several sorts of little fish. Behind the bar, risotto and mashed potato were being ladled in gargantuan portions. Under the glass counter were incredibly ornate, delicious-looking *confetti*. On top were piled dishes of pears and apples and bananas. The cold meats were becomingly trimmed with parsley and sections of Sicilian lemons so incredibly big one looked twice to see if they were real. The espresso coffee promised wakefulness after even the most gluttonous meal.

It was Holy Year, the year the Holy Door is opened by the Pope. I am by upbringing a Lutheran, but I find it not improper to offer a prayer at any temple of God. Early on the morning of Christmas Eve I crossed the Tiber and made my way to St. Peter's Square. With the thousands of others I stood outside waiting. The sky was clear and blue, suddenly 'phtt'—out flew a flock of white pigeons, signifying a Message of Peace to the world.

An old acquaintance who lived with his ageing mother in a faded palace down by the Tiber had asked me if I would join them at Midnight Mass in St. Peter's. So in the evening I presented myself at the palace. There were several other men, and eight or ten ladies, all of them thickly veiled. We drove to St. Peter's Square, and again I stood with a great multitude, a variegated mixture of nationalities, making their way inch by inch towards the Holy Door. The others passed inside, from whence the incense, the intonations and the singing of the choir faintly reached me as I waited in silent prayer.

Back at the palace with its pink, white and yellow marble rooms, there was a sudden awakening of spirit. Like the release of champagne, the gentlemen frothed into volubility. And there was indeed real champagne for supper, which had

been laid in the big tessellated dining-room now alight with candles.

The ladies had gone to remove their veils. It was almost like a fairy story. From under the mystery of the veils it had been possible only vaguely to get a hint of an expressive, well-defined eyebrow but not of any further beauty. I was completely taken by surprise when they reappeared, dazzling in full evening dress and jewels, and as beautiful as only young Italian women can be.

I had a few more days yet. Taormina beckoned. Could a place with so much euphony in its name be other than attractive? By 'plane to Taormina, and thence perilously up the mountain by bus in company with a crowd of peasants, children and chickens. It was New Year's Eve when I arrived at my hotel which had once been an old monastery and was now a rather modern, noisy place. The town seemed quiet and charming, but in the hotel there were too many rich people and too much noise.

I had heard that a Danish lady kept a little pension half-way back down the mountain road. So the next morning I made my way there. The door of the pension was opened by a charming little boy of six who greeted me with a '*Buon giorno*'. 'Are you coming to live here?' he asked. Because my Italian is so poor I answered in Danish. 'You must ask your mother.'

The house was tiny and that always has charm for me. There was a pocket handkerchief of a garden and a room with a veranda, so I went back to my noisy modern playground, packed my things, paid my bill and went down the mountain road again.

A few rides on a donkey, a meeting with a 'period' arch-duchess, with high, wired lace collar and pointed shoes, picnics on the mountain—and then back to London.



## CHAPTER XV

**I**N 1951 Sir Charles Lloyd Jones renewed a previous invitation for me to come out to Sydney and put on a hat show. It might have been Mars for all I knew of Australia, but travel is a magnet and I accepted for the New Year.

Just three days before my departure came the news of King George's death. The nation, at first shocked, deeply mourned. For my part the immediate thing was to make the mourning hats for the royal ladies. A sadder task I had never had.

I telephoned my hosts in Australia to inquire whether they would still like me to come out. Apart from my appearance at the David Jones stores, plans had been made for me to visit several other cities, and to go on to New Zealand, too. The answer came back that it would be appreciated if I could fulfil these engagements. Having postponed the trip a few days, I motored down to London Airport one raw February morning.

Muffled to the chin and nearly blown across the tarmac by a biting wind, I boarded the 'plane. What a windswept gaggle of people we looked! Two Parsec ladies in fur coats, their bright saris clinging to their heads and ankles; a lady in a tent coat that spread like a parachute. Everybody clutching to them the paraphernalia of travel: papers and passports and boarding tickets; briefcases and vanity boxes. Only one gentleman seemed really securely wrapped, buttoned and belted in a remarkably bulky coat with an astrakhan collar.

In spite of my training in anticipating the seasons, I found it hard at that moment to believe in warmth. Yet at Rome

it was indeed quite pleasant. A little warmer in Beirut, and then across the desert to Karachi, a place I had known twenty years before. It was no longer India but Pakistan, and everywhere I could see changes. New buildings jostled ancient, it all looked a bit American. I wanted some post-cards to remind me of the colourful native quarters. Nothing but pictures of the new Town Hall, photographed from the back, the front, the side and the air. Coloured and plain.

It was warm enough in Calcutta to make one welcome a cold shower. The Parsee ladies toddled away in their beautiful saris, their furs over their arms. Most of the passengers had shed their coats. In fact, only the so securely wrapped-up gentleman clung to his, with its fur collar and all its bulky weight. He looked even more remarkable now that everyone else had shed top clothes. Puzzlingly so.

At Port Darwin the heat was almost tropic. A chorus of cicadas accompanied us all along the route from the airfield to the Rest-House, noisy as a mowing machine at close quarters. In sharp contrast was the cackle of the kookaburra, the laughing bird. Laughing at me, no doubt, for not having had the forethought or imagination to come prepared with a really cool suit. Or was it directed at the fur-collared gentleman? He seemed as unwilling to be parted from his coat as a lady from her jewel box. Possibly, thought I, the analogy was not inapt. Well, at the Rest-House there was a swimming pool for all to enjoy. *I swam.*

Airborne again, we crossed three thousand miles of featureless landscape with only an occasional water-hole or tree to break the monotony. Then Sydney, beautiful indeed from the air, slowly came into view.

The directors of David Jones, where I was to show my hats, had turned out to meet me. The head of the millinery department, too, and the 'Press Relations'—those indefatigable artists of surprise, ingenuity, enterprise and propaganda. How well I was to get to know them!

I had been nervous, perhaps a little worried. It is always difficult to know how to put over a show to a strange audience. People and places vary so. Individually I could

recognize the lady starting a new romance and wanting a pink hat with pink petals, or the married woman with a taste for cutting a dash with a swaggering felt and feather. But what were the mass sentiments here, in this wonderful continent on the far side of the world?

The warm handshakes, the kind smiles and the unaffected genuineness of my welcome dispelled my fears. There was friendliness in the very atmosphere. I felt I could understand these people whose natures seemed as sunny as their climate.

It was quite a thrill, and a relief, to find the store was both huge and lovely. From the liftman up there was a cheerful greeting and a helping hand. I knew I would be all right. And my hats, like myself, were among friends.

It is a point of policy with me that in giving a show in a store I get to know as many of the employees as possible. There were several thousand here! Well . . . I would do what I could. I was shown the floor where the show would be held and introduced to twenty-five beautiful model girls. They were as beautiful as any London models, attractive in every way, co-operative, unsnobbish.

I briefed the lift-boy to announce the show: 'Lingerie . . . Knitwear . . . Blouses . . . Mr. THAARUP.' Sir Charles coming up to his office must have been a little surprised.

In 'my' showroom the display men had done a wonderful job, and there was obviously a good bit of enthusiasm. There was a good crowd, and I went out on to the platform for the first show feeling optimistic and happy. It went with a bang. For the next fortnight I gave two shows a day, all the time making new hats to give the show new blood, and all the time hats were selling, selling, selling. The turnover was terrific. At the last a gala show was given. Champagne flowed, good wishes were exchanged.

The hats kept me busy, but they were not all. Tugging at my arm was always one or other of the Press Relations people; rolling me away in a car to this or that radio station, to be a disc jockey, to stand in on a quiz programme, to do a travelogue. But I enjoyed it all, worn out as I was.

I rushed, I worked hard, but the delight of it was that when I was finished for the day, there was the sea and the sand only a ferry away from my door. Even if I had done an evening broadcast I could still swim at midnight. It was a good life.

I moved on to Melbourne. My 'plane was late and the party given in my honour had been going on for hours. But the Press-wallahs, not to be cheated of a 'story', had hung on. They interviewed me as I changed and shaved. 'Quite a party,' I spluttered from under the shower. 'Too right,' they called back as they charged off.

At the elegant store, Georges, where I showed, everyone turned out for the opening night in full evening dress; laying one bogy for me. My cocktail hats would not be despised.

I moved on to Brisbane with its heat and its palm trees and pineapples, and its wattle. Everywhere the delicious, heady scent. Great bunches of it in my hotel room, enough to have supplied all the flower-women of Paris with whom I had so often haggled for a puny little stalk or two.

The same pattern of hat shows and radio shows. But afterwards always the offer of good, kind friendship. My host invited me one evening to drive out and see something of the surrounding country. In a huge high-powered monster we sped out of town, leaving the sea and sand for woodland and scrub. The vastness of it all; and the way things were growing. By the wayside one saw the same moving picture again and again. A young man, stripped to the waist, chopping down a tree, clearing a space around a rude wooden shack. A young woman in blouse and slacks painting away at the little dwelling, at the same time keeping an eye on a baby sleeping in a pram. It was elemental, primitive. It was biblical. The house and the family coming along together.

All these young people, this young country . . . it was casting a spell over me. The glitter and the culture of London had always drawn me. This was the other side of the coin and it tempted me too.

New Zealand was another thrill. To get there I had to return to Sydney and catch a flying-boat which flew across the Tasman Sea, an experience no longer possible. From Rose Bay one went out to the flying-boat in a motor launch. I was a little boy again, simply savouring it for its newness and its fun. The chug of the launch and the surf scuttering by were like an outing by the seaside.

We landed at Wellington and took off again for Christchurch, a wonderful little city. It had dignity and charm; it was rather like an English cathedral city. There was a river and a canal and a pervading air of happiness and peace; a little world within a world.

Ballentynes, the store where I was to show, had been burned down, so to house the audience for my show a huge marquee had been erected and a stage fixed up at one end. Perhaps it was rather more like a circus tent. It roused my sense of showmanship; here we could perhaps capture a bit of light-hearted revelry.

As usual, I found several charming ladies preparing to model for me. It was explained that not all of them were professional, so I arranged to put them through their paces. But first a few touches to the stage. I borrowed some gilt mirrors from the furnishing department, and a bit of drapery; pushed the piano into a corner and added some flowers. The floor space was just gravelled over, but I had two big Persian rugs put down on the stage.

The first show that night was in aid of the Red Cross Society. The proprietor came down during the afternoon; he was just in time to see me rehearsing the models. One very charming lady who was to wear my older type of hats was a little stiff and solemn about it at first. There was so little time before the show, I had to be direct. I used the old model-school formula:

'Pull in your behind, Ma'am. Stick out your bosom. Say C-H-E-E-S-E P-L-E-A-S-E.'

There was a moment's embarrassed silence, then the boss whispered to me, 'That lady is head of the Red Cross, and one of our best customers.'

The lady certainly looked a bit startled, the pianist nearly fell off her seat. 'Ma'am,' I continued, 'that's a beautiful smile you have. Let's take it again. C-H-E-E-S-E P-L-E-A-S-E.'

It all ended well; the lady showed my hats charmingly. Better still, she later became a very good friend. She came to England and called on me. When I went out to New Zealand again, she was nice enough to ask me to her lovely house to meet her family. Six months later I was reminded of it all. I was saying good-bye to a customer in my Brook Street house. She had chosen to walk down the marble stairway, and as she descended a porter laboured up. Over his shoulder was half a frozen lamb wrapped in nothing but a cheese cloth and looking as out of place on the threshold of my salon as a sausage on a rose-trimmed hat. The Christchurch ladies had pooled together to send this to me. It was a wonderfully kind thought and a delicious half lamb too! But what a job I had to get it cut up! I finally took it to a Danish restaurant and got the chef's assistance. That week-end my whole staff had lamb. Even Susie gnawed a cutlet.

In Melbourne I had been asked to make a hat using the locality for my inspiration. Walking round, I had been very impressed by the architecture of the Library. Taking the dome as my inspiration I designed a 'Library' hat, had it photographed on a lovely girl, her gloved hand raised to her horn-rimmed spectacles. Its fame travelled. In Brisbane I was asked to repeat the trick. I chose the pincapple, and made a pretty little yellow bonnet-cum-cloche. It was honeycombed to simulate the spines of the pineapple and sticking up at the side were green feathers imitating the green foliage.

My next stand after Christchurch was in Auckland. And almost the first request was that I should design a hat appropriate to that vicinity. I went down to the beach. There, a little way off, glinting in the heat, was the volcano Rangitoto. I did a sketch of it, went back to the city and made a wide-brimmed hat with the shallow crown following the

same three-point silhouette as on Rangitoto. All in tiki green velvet. And they loved it.

I flew back to Sydney.

'How's biz?' asked the newspaper boy on the corner.

'That's him,' came a sibilant whisper from a lady at a nearby lunch table. 'And I haven't got one of his on.' The Press had certainly done me well. It seemed even the back of my head was recognizable!

The last six weeks had been some of the most stimulating in my life. And some of the hardest working. I wanted a breather. The map showed Honolulu only a 'flip' across the ocean. A place I could not miss seeing; a place to relax. I made my adieux and with as warm handshakes as those which had made me so welcome I sealed my promises to return. Then I packed my bags.

We sailed in over Honolulu and soon I bowled along to my hotel. The most *beautiful* hotel. As clean as a very new hatpin! I shot up to my room in a delicious dream. The view over Waikiki Bay was as wonderful as I had been told. The air shimmered with heat; the coral red sand and the blue sea called. I threw off my clothes, in lordly disorder: there would be a valet. I put on my bathing trunks, grabbed the outsize bath towel and pattered out to the lift.

Down on the beach. Wonderful, just sun and sea and coral sand. And a lot of bronzed men and women. I swam and I lay on the sand and I swam again. I splashed through the warm shallow water; too warm, almost. I lay down and closed my eyes. A thought pierced my mind. What had I done about money? *What?* And a minute later; that was a beautiful room. I wonder how much it costs! I WONDER HOW MUCH IT COSTS!

I flew to the reception hall of the hotel. *Thirty-two* dollars!

'Does that include all meals?' 'No.' 'Breakfast?' 'No.' 'Service?' 'No.' It was just like listening to Molotov!

I had just sixty-two dollars, and I had intended to stay three days. There were no cheaper rooms, so I said I would finish my swim and then pack. They could let my room.

Back on the beach the lovely girls wandered by, hatless and brown. Then I noticed something odd. Every young man, including the U.S. servicemen, wore a hat. A hat of plaited coco-nut leaves with a funny little gadget on top. The hats were made, I learnt, by a character called Coco-nut Willie, so I sought him out. The challenge was irresistible. I arranged to take lessons from Coco-nut Willie the next morning.

But I still had to think of some way out of my dilemma, moneyless in an expensive Eden.

I mooched back to the hotel. A sudden wave of strength flooded in on me; I would keep that room for just one night. It was so beautiful. Afterwards? Well . . . I need not eat.

But hunger is a fine driving force. What about the radio? I telephoned. They did not know me from Adam, but I did a little explaining: blew my trumpet a little. The result was a six-minute broadcast that very evening. And sixty dollars!

The Press came next morning. To see Mr. Thaarup, they explained to the management in the reception office. The management called me and I answered lazily from my comfortable bed where I was enjoying breakfast. My tone now was very different. 'I'll be down in twenty minutes,' I called back. And then rather artfully, 'Would it interest the management for me to say how much I was enjoying my stay at their lovely hotel?' . . . Hhmmmmmm. Well. Hmm. That would be very nice. Hmm. Perhaps under the circumstances the management might be able to reduce the price of my room a little.

I sailed down. I could truthfully add a rider to my story: the hotel *was* beautiful.

I had air under my wings; and I loved it. My three days up, I decided to take a peep at Hollywood. My ticket took me through, I only hoped that the bankers' draft I had cabled for would be waiting for me at San Francisco.

A haze clouds the memory of my trip to Los Angeles, perhaps subconsciously created to hide some of the things I saw. If I peer through, there is a jumble of impressions. The Hotel Biltmore, old-fashioned and beautiful. Inside, all



crimson and gilt elegance; Victorian and very prim. The Salvation Army holding a conference. The *brass* bassoons everywhere. 'Abide With Me.' Outside, pornographic photographs being sold. Everywhere quite abhorrent signs of coarse wealth and threadbare bravado.

The lovely stores; Miss Mac West battling round the revolving door; a visit to my friend, the beautiful Greer Garson. Those were some of the nice things to remember. But there were others harsh and hard. I was not happy. I flew back to San Francisco, where people were polite, where the waiters said 'Thank you', and everybody was rather nicely dressed, as befits a city with a soul.

Then back to London. Hair was being cut, sheared and gnawed; hats were shrinking. Impossible to condense into words the huge variety of hats I made that year, or adequately differentiate. Even bows were varied enough to take a page of description. The chic, fine rouleau looped five or six times; width without weight; a little of the stratagem of some of the modern sculpture that has holes in it. Velvet bows clustered soft as peach-bloom; floppy powder-wig bows draped and fell to shoulder depth. Feathers were as varied; lace was used, flowers built into the structure of the hat. The universal trend at that time was for a close-fitting small hat. The 'Tudor line' and the 'Gothic line' had had a season. Then, as the old year petered out and a new one was born, a new motif appeared. The influence of the coming Coronation of Queen Elizabeth began to be felt. The Elizabethan hat became the rage. Anything sixteenth century was the stuff.

With others who served Her Majesty I had that year the very great honour of receiving a ticket for the Palace for the day of the Coronation. Not only was this an honour but it carried with it a privilege which many of the highest in the land would have enjoyed on that glorious day. Whilst Peers and Peeresses were literally up with the first lark, living, as I did, just across the park, and it not being necessary to be at the Palace before eight-thirty, I had almost my usual sleep that morning.

From the first floor overlooking the inner court-yard of Buckingham Palace I watched the notables arrive, heard the rumble of the carriages and the roars of approval. Queen Salote, Sir Winston, in the uniform of the Warden of the Cinque Ports, and Lady Churchill. The colours, even on that grey day, shone out bravely. But the inspiring moment came when a message from the Queen asked us to go to the corridor outside her apartments.

The Queen stepped out, looking more beautiful, more lovely than ever before. And smiling happily. The dress she wore is now history, but that first glimpse of the Queen wearing it was certainly electrifying. The richness of the material, the magnificence of the embroidery, could only be described as truly royal. And the Queen looked as though she loved it.

We watched the departures from the balcony, and after lunch again went on to the balcony to watch the return of the carriages. By now the Court hairdresser, shoemaker and milliner, notables and foreign royalty were all mixed up. The one, the only thing, was for all to lean over the balcony and cheer as the beautiful young Queen stepped out of her carriage, looking as fresh and radiant as ever, despite the immense claims that day of days must have made upon her.

A couple of acres of spartra we used that year in my workrooms. A million millinery pins. Where, by the way, do pins go? Is there a limbo, somewhere where the shades of pins foregather to tell of the pomp and ceremony at which they have assisted? Of the fashion and fancy in which they played a part? And then cast out!

Some hats have brief lives, some incredible longevity. I went to a fancy-dress ball, an 'in aid of' affair. Advertised on the programme was a raffle; a raffle for a *genuine* Aage Thaarup hat. I was naturally interested. I put my half-crown in the jingling raffle tin and took a peep inside the hatbox. Genuine enough. Vintage, in fact. It was a hat that I had made in 1930, and now it was 1954!

Her Majesty was to visit Australia and New Zealand that year, a visit promised before King George's death. I had already made my own arrangements to make a second trip out there and though I was to leave after the royal party I should be in Sydney before them. I had had a busy time in my showrooms and had completed a large number of hats for the Queen's tour. I looked forward to even so short a respite as the three days' flight out. Actually, I took about four days, going out this time the opposite way round the globe; first to America, then Honolulu, and across the Pacific.

But before I went there was another move to be arranged. The lease of my premises in Brook Street had run out. I found new ones in Brook's Mews. Not so grand, not quite so convenient; but premises were getting harder and harder to find. These had a little bit of atmosphere and I felt I could do something with them. They had one inestimable advantage: taxis could draw up comfortably. The knowledgeable customer could even find a place to park her car. More pots of paint, more carpets and the usual inauguration party. It was a real relief to get aboard the 'plane and head for America.

On my first trip to Australia I had learned the lesson of the 'five-shirt day'; this time I was equipped with cool clothing.

At New York we landed in a blizzard. It was icy when we arrived in Chicago. San Francisco was colder than usual and I began to wonder whether my dream of warmth and sunshine was a mere chimera. But at least the temperature gave me a chance to get some exercise after the restriction of the flight. I marched up Telegraph Hill to tantalize myself with the sight of the little houses that climb step by deep step up its incline. I saw my old friend, Paul, whom so many ladies who have had their hair styled in Elizabeth Arden's London salon would remember. I dived into Chinatown to eat chop-suey; and then took off again, following the sun.

The beach at Honolulu was as wonderful as ever. But

behind the first rows of hotels had sprung up a second array. There were more shops, more people. One cannot keep good things to oneself . . . but for me the place had lost a little of its savour. But, never mind, I was off to a land where one could have all the space one could use.

'Whatever you are doing tomorrow, don't do it.' The characteristically forthright message came from my old friend and boss, Sir Charles Lloyd Jones. I found it waiting for me on my arrival in Sydney. 'I want you to come to lunch,' it continued. 'There is someone I should like you to meet.'

Sir Charles's son came to collect me next day and to motor me out to his father's lovely house. Sitting on the veranda was the 'someone' I was to meet, a tall upstanding man. He turned his head, and at once I recognized Mr. Menzies, the Commonwealth Prime Minister.

At the lunch which followed there occurred an instance of very charming kindness. We sat down to a lunch of roast beef and horseradish sauce. It couldn't have been more British. After the cheese, Mr. Menzies leaned forward. 'Mr. Thaarup, you have made a great many hats in your life. Which of all the ladies who have worn them would you like to toast?'

I looked up, startled. Though it was only a second before I answered, like a drowning man I had reviewed a whole history of hats, page after page after page. One name stood out, that of a lady who quite early in my career had shown faith in my ability: Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

We rose to our feet. Mr. Menzies raised his glass. 'Skaal,' he said. It was not until afterwards, remembering that familiar Danish salute, that I realized the compliment to my country also.

The handshakes everywhere were as warm as ever; the smiles and the open friendliness. For this visit I was to show my hats on the sixth floor of David Jones, a floor displaying expensive merchandise, and which needed a fillip. Now seemed a timely moment. All the ladies would want a new hat for the approaching royal visit. I

worked hard for a fortnight, giving the usual two shows a day, racing off to broadcast in between shows.

Sydney was in an exultant and exuberant mood. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were already in New Zealand, and Sydney came next in the royal itinerary. The decorations were already up. Blue and gold and red; flowers, banners and flags. Against the background of perpetual blue sky they blazed magnificently; silently trumpeting a joyous welcome. It was the happiest of cities.

How I enjoyed the friendly atmosphere; the sunshine, the bathes, the fruit. The strangers, and the familiar. Again I got the idea of growth. It is said that if you stood in the midst of a plantation of sweet corn you would actually hear the murmur of leaf on leaf as they grew. So if you listened with your heart, you felt you could hear Australia reaching up, up to the stars.

A funny thing happened in Sydney. I had been blessed with magnificent Press notices on my previous visit, and kind compliments from everyone. Even the girls in the workroom—to whom one is generally no hero—seemed quite to like working for me. But now I was to lose face. And with a vengeance.

The Queen was still in New Zealand but would soon be embarking for Sydney. A message was received from Government House, Wellington. Would Mr. Thaarup get in touch? I put through a long-distance call and learned that the Queen needed more hats, especially *white* hats. Would I make some and have them ready for Her Majesty on her arrival in Sydney? And would I please not publicize this.

I set about designing the hats. To be discreet I put the order down to a 'Miss Donald'. The workgirls were a little puzzled. These hats for 'Miss Donald' were obviously special hats. And if Mr. T. was so fussy about them, why were there no fittings? Who was this 'Miss Donald' whom no one had seen? It was rather mysterious, they agreed.

We worked the clock round to complete those hats in time, for my own programme took me on to Melbourne

quite soon. But the hats were finished in time and I had them packed up, secretly addressed them to Government House, Sydney, and personally delivered them by taxi, to await Her Majesty's arrival. Then I packed my own things and went off happily to Melbourne. It was only on my return to Sydney, some weeks later, that I heard what had happened, and how my reputation was mud in the workroom.

The girls, hanging from the third-floor windows of the store to see the Queen and the Duke go by, to cheer and wave, had naturally noticed the hat the Queen was wearing. It was exactly like one of the hats they had made for the mysterious 'Miss Donald'. Clinging by their toenails, they nearly toppled out. Their disgust was quite terrific. Whoever that 'Miss Donald' was . . . they did not care. But fancy Mr. Thaarup copying the Queen's hats for someone else! Check!

At Melbourne I showed at Myers' Emporium. Mr. Norman Myers said to me, 'I hear your shows are charming, Mr. Thaarup. *Intime*.' Then he showed me the dining-hall where I was to show. It seated one thousand people. The steps leading up to the platform numbered thirty-two. But then it's a big country.

An outback farmer was introduced to me by the manager. He had brought his wife two hundred miles just for the outing. 'Why not buy your wife a hat?' I suggested. 'What should I do with a hat in the outback?' said the lady. Nevertheless, she took one. And believe it or not, on my next trip out to Australia she came back for another. The first had been a huge success. Moral—never underestimate the power of a hat!

I took my hat-boxes to Dunedin in New Zealand, a little town with Scottish ancestry. And Scottish hospitality. I thought they had perhaps overdone things with a window full of photographs of me and in the middle a life-sized effigy. It came as a bit of a shock. I had another shock, a pleasant one, when I was taken to see the scenery. Where else can one find a town with a mountain at each end of the main street? It is almost a fantasy.

I dined with Sir Willoughby and Lady Norrie in Wellington. The fresh paint and something lingering in the atmosphere told of the formal receptions that had so recently been held in Government House.

My pilgrimage now was no longer in front, but behind the royal tour. And like a trail of clues there was always some spot which the natives could point to. If you explored a cave, the Queen had been there. If you looked at a mountain, the Queen had looked at it. It was almost the cry so familiarly used about an earlier Queen Elizabeth. The Queen *slept here*.

Everywhere I had been in Australia and New Zealand I found good models. And what a boon that was. How grateful I am to all the charming girls and middle-aged ladies who have shown off my hats. Tall, not so tall, plump, slender, merry-eyed and languorous. Each with something to give. And how hard these models work. On bun lunches, with tea-less afternoons. In stuffy dressing-rooms and under the heat of spotlights. And yet still with smiles. Bless them!

In Auckland I was lucky enough to get the help of one of the most charming models I have ever had. Her complexion was all milk and roses; she had white teeth and big appealing eyes. Her fair hair was long and brushed into a big, shining chignon. She held her head well, she used her feet gracefully, but it was a little bit of natural feminine guile that captured my heart.

Most of the hats she was showing were little forward-tilted affairs, 'side-saddles' that I love so well. One of them was in black velvet with a scrap of Chantilly lace. I had borrowed a very pretty black velvet frock with a rustling taffeta petticoat. Worn with the little hat with the Chantilly lace the ensemble simply asked for a rose; so we picked a beauty from one of the millinery showcases.

Down the long aisle of the showroom the girl came, just a hint of naughtiness in her glance. She had picked up the hem of the velvet frock to show the taffeta petticoat and caught it at the waist with the rose. It was delicious, provocative.

Soon I was back in Port Darwin, where I again swam in the green swimming pool, and where the cicadas still chirruped. Then on to Singapore, that Charing Cross of the East. It was so hot that my tropical suit shrank on me, like a wet bathing costume. The ladies went hatless, gloveless and without nylons. The world of fashion sweltered impotent against that heat.

I had a few days free before returning to England so I decided to accept an invitation to visit an old friend, the Sultana of Johore. The Sultan kindly sent an A.D.C. to meet me. We motored up through the rubber plantations and past the old palace, a venerable building in the traditional voluptuous style. Through the lush tropical gardens we sped on, and, at the top, the new palace which, in strange contrast, was ultra-modern; all straight lines and simple geometrical ornament. And topped with a very western-looking green roof. But its vastness took the breath away. Everything was in bakers' dozens, salons, bathrooms, sleeping apartments and all.

Insatiable for new experience I wanted to see Siam. I decided to go to Bangkok. The Sultan advised me that it was a mad idea. The place was full of bacilli. There were mosquitoes. You must *drink* whisky, *eat* whisky and *bathe* in whisky, I was told, in order to kill the germs.

But I went.

For five pounds a night I found a little room, a room so minute there was scarcely space for more than a bed and an electric fan. The fan, I soon discovered, hardly lowered the temperature by more than half a degree. Outside was a tiny veranda—but not for me. That was where the little Chinese servant, his wife and baby slept. Slept? They ate and they cooked there. They lived there. It was like having a family.

The restaurants were air-conditioned. Never before or since have I shown so much interest in food and drink. One emerged from lunch regaled and cool, but the furnace-like heat outside sent one scuttling back for another cool drink.



When it rained, the rain came down in ropes. If it thundered it nearly cracked the ear-drums. And the lightning illuminated the sky without pause. And afterwards there were a dozen little fires, each one someone's little home alight.

I went up the river—Mother River, they call it. Lining the banks were the little houses on stilts. But some of the people lived right over the river, on big rafts, washing and drinking from the river. And without any whisky! The floating market showed that one could shop for a wide variety of things, from a cheese to a writing desk.

As I journeyed down the river the little thirteen-year-old mother with a baby in her arms smiled. The old man cooking his rice on his raft smiled. The young one sorting out the remnants of his burnt-down house smiled. Rightly they call it the 'Land of Smiles'.

Seeing it all was exciting and I enjoyed it, but returning, home seemed very 'homy'. Very secure, very comfortable. A shirt lasted a whole day, the water out of the tap could be drunk, undiluted with whisky. I could go to bed without a mosquito-net and without any thoughts of ravage by fire or high water. One soon settled down into a routine. The complexities of my business took hold and downed any lingering thoughts of a simpler life.

Short, shorter, shortest. Only a crew-cut was left to some ladies. As the hair fell on the hairdressers' floors the scissors snipped a bit more off the hats in my workrooms. The 'half-hat' was in.

But like a lot of other things, though the size was less the price was more. One of my oldest customers came to see me, a charming woman with the ability to wear a hat with nonchalance, always as though she had half a dozen more just as pretty. And, of course, she had. Generally she came with some proviso. 'To match my emeralds. To go with my aquamarines.' This time it was rubies.

I made a hat for Edwige Feuillère about this time. It was for a French film and, alas, in the list of costume

credits I never saw my name. But it was a pleasure to make the hat all the same. Just to watch this great artiste as she raised her hands to adjust the hat, the slight tilt of her head and the glance from her eye, was real poetry of movement. And what an ocean of commentary there was in her look of appraisal! Naturally beautiful and naturally graceful, to see her in front of a mirror was to see a rose opening in the sun.

Another year's work and I was off to Australia again. It was good business and it was very pleasant. I loved the people and I loved the country. The ladies were very hat conscious and both my model hats and my 'Teen and Twenty' were doing well. My trips were, I was told, as much looked forward to by the Australian women as they were by myself. Certainly my welcome was always kind. And as proof that my hats were interesting the Australians, some copyists had got going. Doing my usual fortnight of shows in Sydney, I walked round the town one lunch-hour. In at least three shops there were copies of one of my special hats. When I got back to the store and put on my show that afternoon I added a bit to my usual little story.

'Ladies,' I said, 'if you like this hat I ought to warn you that you can get a very excellent copy of it for 39s. 6d. in such-and-such a street. But farther out of town, there is a still better copy and it only costs 21s. 6d.' How they laughed!

That third trip was a highly successful trip. My order-books looked more than promising. I got on to the 'plane home feeling happy and satisfied. It was good to feel that wherever I went I could make a living. The expression 'the best of both worlds' seemed aptly to describe my way of life now. All seemed sunshine.

The journey home was one of the nicest I had made. I stopped in Beirut, and again in Damascus, the walled city, enjoying every minute of the strange life, the colour and the romance. At Athens I left the 'plane to search out a little hotel with family associations. It was an oft-told story at home that an uncle had once stayed in Athens, so I must

look up his sanctuary. It proved to be a shabby, dusty little place; but there was a veranda where I could sleep and where I could look right across to the Acropolis, so I dumped my baggage. Early in the morning, with a bottle of native wine, some cheese and a basket of fruit I climbed up to the Acropolis. The sun set, the moon rose and midnight struck before I came away, having passed thirteen of the most peaceful and serene hours of my life.

Another day in Athens, then back to London and my workrooms. There was just time to make a few hats inspired by my Middle East vacation and, with the originals from Damascus and Athens which I had brought home with me, dash off to Lime Grove to Peter Duncan and an appearance in 'In Town Tonight'.

## CHAPTER XVI

**B**ACK in 1936 that charming lady, Jane Gordon, author and journalist, wrote this in the *News Chronicle*:

If I were a psycho-analyst I would go into partnership with a really smart milliner. Because if I knew my job as a psycho-analyst, I would realize that most inhibitions and repressions that afflict the modern woman could be cured quite simply by a new hat. And one of the first men I would approach would be Aage Thaarup . . . his hats could be guaranteed to cure any inferiority complex!

Although that was not the earliest of the thousands of notices that have been given to my hats, it reminds me of how long and how deeply I am indebted to the kind understanding, the intelligent and often delightfully witty writing of fashion editors and journalists. I am quite humble at the thought of all the nice things they have said about me and all the help, through publicity, which these ladies have given me. They have been written from the psychological and the socialite angle, and from the factual and the practical.

I think it is true to say that no fashion business such as mine could today exist without the Press, including, of course, the various magazines. I acknowledge this with genuine understanding of the benefits which Press notices can confer. And with real gratitude for what is too often taken for granted.

Naturally the coin has two sides. The *quid pro quo* arrangement between the Press and fashion houses could only

endure as long as fashion houses had interesting 'news' to give the Press. And 'news' that made interesting pictures. So, in a sense, each fashion house not only deserves its publicity but also repays its debt.

From my earliest days in India I have collected all notices about myself or my hats; all photographs and drawings, too. Now they lie in an outsize trunk, a varied documentary, a graphic history of hats over nearly three decades and tangent to contemporary events. Here, as well as the changing fashions, the changing face of woman is recorded.

Incidentally, these cuttings tell a slight tale of a humble Dane and his climb from obscurity; and of half a lifetime spent in pursuit of . . . what? Fashion? Beauty? Call it what you will.

A third strand of the story tells of the change that has come over the status of the woman fashion writer; not simply her elevation to a lion's share of newsprint, and presumably a proportionate reward, but a change in principle. No longer is she regarded as the sop to ten per cent of the readers. She is the cog in the printing press that puts half the morning papers on the breakfast table, and half the evening papers on the 5.30 down-train.

In my dealings with the Press I have always tried for the maximum of co-operation. The simple thing—if you can call it simple—is to put on a Press show. And I have done this many, many times. But it has always seemed to me important to offer opportunities for individual stories. I detest what is called the Press hand-out. Not only do I deem this unacceptable to the resourceful writer but if, as 'hand-outs' sometimes do, it claims an omniscient knowledge of 'what will be worn', then I think it is rather cheeky. Any manifesto, surely, should be modest enough for it to be clear that it contains only the views of whoever writes it; and that it is not direct from the Gods of Fashion.

Another reason why I have never thought the Press show to be all-sufficient is that, with me, a collection is never finished. I believe that with many designers the practice is to make a certain number of models each season, then to



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*H.R.H. Princess Margaret at the 'Associated Millinery Designers of London' show in 1950*



*New Zealand, 1952. The famous volcano Rangitoto is the inspiration for a hat, . . .*

*. . . in tiki green velvet*



cut out the ones they do not like, and to concentrate on the remainder. As soon as the models have been shown, workrooms and sales girls operate on this fixed number. But I do not work that way.

First of all, when I give a show, the best hats are still in the workroom and come down with pins in them. Or I might, as I did in one show, make all the hats in spartra and wire, merely foreshadowing the shapes of the hats I am going to make. But when the show is over, my collection is still not set. I go on developing my theme, adding to my models right through the season. It seems to me, therefore, more important and interesting for a writer to come and see me when she is ready to do a story, rather than come out with the same story at the same time as her rivals.

I consider that I have been very fortunate indeed with publicity, but then I have always had great respect for the ladies who write fashion news. If one of them telephones me I always make a point of seeing her and doing my share towards giving her a story. She may ask for my help in designing a hat to wear with glasses; or it may be she wants to write about my last trip; or perhaps wants to illustrate—for argument's sake—the 'oriental influence'. I take a piece of paper, or a piece of spartra, or a bit of felt, and I will sit up and work at it until I am in the mood to create what she wants. I will have that hat ready for her to photograph the next day. It will not be beautifully finished, but it will be there to illustrate her story. That is how I have always worked.

A thing I have enjoyed doing, and I have done it often, is to co-operate in a feature showing how to make a hat. I did it for a double spread in *Picture Post* and I have done it for a dozen magazines as far afield as the *Australian Woman's Day* and the new *She*. From felts to straw, and pipe-cleaners to flowers. It has given me pleasure for the quite simple reason that I hope it has given pleasure to the readers. Not only the pleasure of making themselves a hat that costs less than a hat bought in a shop, but that wonderful satisfaction that can be had by using—if one has it—the talent



that lies in one's fingers. If I have helped in its achievement I am glad.

Do I think it bad business to show how to make a hat? No; it can only be a simple hat that I can describe and even then not all of those that are made will be successful. But an interest will have been created. It needs a craftsman, of course, to make a hat, and an artist, too. The placing of the simplest bit of ornament needs discrimination and a sure eye. If the novice has that, then good luck to her, and happy hat-making.

When I look through that packed trunk of Press notices, as I have had to do to remind me of this and that, and to check dates and names for this book, I sigh a little for past enthusiasm. Perhaps I should say for past leisure time. The early years have scrapbooks with neatly pasted pictures and notices, all dated and marked with the name of the publication in which they appeared. They are, moreover, arranged with some thought for a decorative whole, and the books themselves have some uniformity.

But as the years go by the books take all sorts of shapes and sizes and character. There are some in sober dark green covers and some made of huge sheets of bright pink canvas. The books grow in thickness as well as in area. No longer is there a neatly decorative line round the paste-up, and the flourish of the date gives place to a crude stick-on label from a Press-cutting agency. That is not the only fall from grace. From between each of the closely covered pages of the scrapbook flutter untidy little piles of tear-outs that have found no sticking room. Later still comes the time when the cuttings are simply shovelled into vast filing boxes. *Mea culpa*. Cosseted still less are those of recent years which have been bundled unceremoniously into big paper hat-bags! But they are loved none the less, for all that.

I try to find a particular reference in this 'olla podrida,' and as I heave out the pink canvas books they shed a sheaf of unpasted tear-outs, to mingle with the contents of the already burst paper bags. Short and long columns of news-print, four-column spreads of photos or drawings. Shiny

pages from socialite and swank magazines, double-spreads and coloured covers from others less glossy in appearance but no less confident in their appeal to readerships up to, and over, the three million mark. It only needed two good splashes to occur in the same week to know that five million women were looking at pictures of 'Aage Thaarup' hats. Admiring, criticizing, envying, hating, copying or being bored by them. Well, even if they hate them, is it not an axiom in Fleet Street that there is no bad publicity?

It is bewildering and it is a nostalgic business looking through these cuttings. How well I remember the first fine thrill of getting pictures into *Harper's Bazaar* and into *Vogue*. And then, when the other monthly magazines began to notice me; the monthlies and the weeklies and then the daily newspapers. And the trade papers, too. Some of the magazines have passed out of circulation. And some of the newspapers, too. Here is a full page from the now extinct *Sunday Referee*. Under the heading 'Test Your Dress Sense' are photographs of six actresses; Jessie Matthews, Constance Cummings, Madeleine Carroll, Anna Lee, Ginger Rogers and Sylvia Sidney. There are also six pictures of six of my hats. It is a competition in which the skill lies in suiting each of the stars with a hat. I am the judge as well as the designer of the hats. The prize is free silk stockings for a year. Silk!

Such charming faces look out from some of the scrap-books and from the whirlwind of scattered bits of paper. In the early days they look out a little more gently, more pensively and, I think, with perhaps a little more individuality. Well-known faces smile from many pages, drawings from well-known artists grace others. Eric, Bouché, Grafstrom, are a few of the names. Frances Marshall and Robb race from early promise to mature competence.

Well-known photographers' work is there, and I recall that I not only introduced Baron to the ballet, but also the equally famous Norman Parkinson to fashion.

It was right back in the days when he was already established in Dover Street as a portraitist. We had been

talking about his studio portraits and the different angles from which he took them. This gave me an idea.

'I should like a picture of two of my Ascot hats taken from above. Will you do that for me?' I asked.

We got a ladder, we posed the two hats; one was a black felt cartwheel—it was just when everybody else was doing straws—and we put it on a shiny white background. Then this tall young man climbed this tall ladder and took the pictures. Lady Mount Temple, one of my most charming and kind customers, was persuaded to pose in some more Ascot hats. When the job was done, Mr. Parkinson took the photos round to *Harper's Bazaar*, where they were accepted. And that was the beginning of his career as a fashion photographer.

Quite early in my career I was challenged by an American reporter who came to see me without warning. The challenge was that I should make five hats in an hour, and that they should be made in the room in which we stood without seeking any materials from outside.

I was young and I was frightened by the power of the Press. I was also excited by it, and this put me on my mettle. I started by cutting off about three inches from the bottom of my curtain. I made another hat from some newspapers and a third from some brown paper. I found a rose and a feather lying in a corner and on my desk a sponge which was there for the purpose of wetting stamps.

Somehow, I made the five hats. They were not, of course, wearable, but they made extremely smart pictures and I won the challenge, with some very good publicity.

Normally, I do not like stunt hats, but I realize that there is a game to play. Some ladies want to have their pictures in the papers and the right hat can guarantee that. Especially if it is worn at Ascot. But I sometimes wonder what overseas visitors think of some of the hats at this so-British gathering. Many are, of course, very beautiful indeed, but some have clearly been designed only as camera catchers. Put an elephant's trunk down the back of a hat, or tarantulas

crawling over it, and the gentleman with a camera will beat the horses to a photo-finish!

If in designing hats I have occasionally had my tongue in my cheek, it is because I have tried to do something for everybody. There have been serious writers, there have been jocular writers, students of irony, dealers in parable. What was meat for one was poison for another. Through it all, I have tried never to lose sight of my most positive belief that the function of a hat is to add charm to a woman. In *some* way.

Well, I have made a lot of friends amongst the Press; I have enjoyed working with them. And I think this is an appropriate place to say . . . 'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.'

## CHAPTER XVII

I WAS forty-nine.

I stepped out briskly from my hotel in Carlos Place. Brook's Mews was only five minutes away. There had been no time before leaving for Australia to find myself another flat and I should have to do that soon. But business first. Having kept my appointment with Peter Duncan I must now get down to some real work.

Even at nine-thirty in the morning the wide expanse of cobblestones in the mews was already more than half covered with cars. Gleaming black Rolls stood bonnet by bonnet with Humbers and sleek Healeys; a few pale, bathroomy looking transatlantic monsters stuck out their bechromed posteriors, compelling one to skirt the queue.

All those cars. . . . Years ago I had designed an autumn collection inspired by motor-cars. What fun all the journalists had had in writing about them. Olive Melville Brown in the *Daily Sketch*:

Conversation overheard in Bond Street:

First Smart Woman: 'Oh! My dear, what a nuisance! One of my exhaust pipes has worked loose.'

Second Smart Woman: 'Well, my sweet, if you *will* wear a Mercedes-Benz: personally I prefer my Daimler, that corrugated radiator is *so* flattering to the face.'

The piece ran on:

Yes, you've guessed it. Hats are taking a ride, and little Danish Aage Thaarup is at the wheel!

That was a long time ago.

Ruminating thus, I turned when a car drew up and two ladies got out. Stepping precariously on their pin heels they hugged their fur wraps close. Although it was April it was still unpleasantly cold. Subconsciously, I registered the fact that their hats were winter hats.

The familiar awning in red and white hove in view, the little entrance and the two steps down, then my staff. Alas, one welcome was missing. Dear little Susie was no more.

I had been away three months, and whilst I had been melting in semi-tropical climates, London had been freezing under frost and snow, hail and sleet. The weather had been so wretched everybody seemed to have a red nose.

I knew what that meant. It is sunshine and warmth which sell spring hats. A cold, 'late' spring keeps customers away. But I was not especially worried. I had done wonderful business in Australia and New Zealand. I had taken huge orders for my 'Teen and Twenty' and 'Twenty Plus' hats. The trade on this side of my business would have to balance the poor receipts on the model side.

My new Brook's Mews premises wanted a bit more doing to them. One wall in the main salon could be repainted a different colour. Some pot plants in front of the Venetian blinds would add charm; and a huge screen covered with a chic montage of photographs of some of my hats. I looked round for ways of stirring up business. I would put on an intimate little show to interest some of my old customers. With a bit of personal attention things would be all right.

Some of the hats I had made for 'In Town Tonight' could go into the show. The little theatre hat adaptation of an Arab head-dress; the satin cap with the long silver tassels that I had copied from a cap I had bought from a Greek soldier, an Evzone in a ballet skirt; the big wide-brimmed coolie hat inspired by those I had seen in the rice-fields of Malaya.

I made a lot more new hats, choosing my materials carefully and designing the hats with real thought for the customers who were to see them. Between times, I made the

customary arrangements for a piano and a pianist; for flowers, model girls, lights and so on. And of course, for the little gold chairs seen at all shows, and sat on by the distinguished, the wealthy and the notorious alike.

Since my salon was not very large, I had sent out invitations for four separate shows, covering two consecutive days. Naturally it meant an extra strain on everybody: staff, model girls and myself. The jokes, the fun, the smiles and the genuine enthusiasm—somehow one can pluck them out of the air *once*. It is harder work to repeat it all, and then all over again.

But they were pretty hats, and I like to think that they were happy shows despite the fact that I was troubled. Under the bright lights of the salon the model girls smiled and shrugged, looked haughty and looked demure, sweeping and swaying to the lilting notes of the piano. And, a little like the clown with the broken heart, I went on with the commentary. All the time, behind the photo-montage and the Venetian blinds, strange things were happening. Accountants were at work, busily, urgently; for since my return, there had been several disturbing letters.

It has always been a habit with me to do a mental stock-taking each morning and evening. Last thing at night, just before I drop off to sleep, I parade the day's affairs. Good and bad. The smile on a bus . . . those escalopes de veau . . . ought Miss Smith to have a rise? . . . the black hoods, are they right? . . . the way I tied a bow . . . the hat that must be gone over. . . . Before I have had time to stretch in the morning a new kaleidoscope occupies my mind. Mend the vacuum cleaner . . . Miss Smith's overtime . . . letter to South Africa . . . order ribbon . . . hair cut . . . more butter.

My precept now is to eliminate unnecessary cares. I do not need butter; overboard with mending the vacuum cleaner. Don't worry. Do your best. KEEP CALM.

Nowadays, when I awoke, I repeated my maxim over and over. But the separate and alarming items of the kaleidoscope jostled one another insistently. They were of a new

and frightening order and clearly could not be tossed into the discard.

One of the things that I had come back to was the plain evidence of a bad spring season. Yet, despite this, I found that stock buying had gone on at an unwarrantable rate. A great deal of money had been spent, a lot was owing, and a great deal of stock piled up. In a business such as mine had developed into, there is a lag between the time when cash has to be paid out to the manufacturers of my designs and when money is received from bulk orders sent abroad. I had designed a lot of hats and done very good business with them abroad; but now for the first time my creditors were unwilling to wait for payment. And, according to my auditors, I owed vast sums. Even more than was owing to me.

Head over heels, I was in debt. From this point my progress downhill never stopped. The sum owing staggered me. I confess I had never greatly liked the figure side of my business, but with such an amount of trade it seemed unbelievable that the accounts did not balance. All the time there was that stock, dating . . . dating.

Like a rolling snowball the trouble got bigger and bigger. No sooner was it whispered of than from every side came fresh difficulties. Quite quickly business came to a standstill.

My state was almost trance-like. I had come home from Australia full of zeal and plans for the future. I had done excellent business, and not a shadow of this catastrophe had crossed my sunlit path. All happened in a short six weeks. As with a knife I was at one blow cut down to . . . nothing. Nothing!

When you read of a man 'going bust' do you ever stop to think of all that it means? Bankruptcy! An easy word to say, but to find oneself denuded of all worldly possessions—business gone, credit gone, and one's name a joke. Looked at askance even by erstwhile 'friends'. As humbled as a general stripped of epaulettes and sword to the sound of a tapping drum.

On the advice of my solicitors and auditors I filed a petition of bankruptcy.



I had created and together with the Luton manufacturers built the 'Teen and Twenty' business. Now this would pass to other hands. 'Teen and Twenty' would no longer bear my name; no longer be designed by me. Lock, stock and barrel my interest in this was gone.

At the first hint of these dark clouds I had cut my expenses, moving out to a friend's flat in North London. On the day I walked away from Carey Street I had neither flat nor business premises of my own. According to the law only the suit and the shirt and the shoes in which I stood were mine. If I possessed one, I could still lay claim to a mattress.

But there were intangible things, things not easily assessed which no one could divest me of. I still had my head and my skill. And after the first shock I had spirit. Somehow, I meant to climb out of bankruptcy. And the creditors should be paid.

Above all, and with more immediately tangible effect, there was real friendship. Even at this date, to record the kind, generous and thoughtful evidences of this fills my heart. One act stands out not only for its real understanding and benevolence, but for a truly fantastic coincidence. If any single event in my life could stretch the reader's credulity, this easily might. I can only quote that truth is stranger than fiction.

As I left Carey Street, a key was pressed into my hand. The donor was a woman business friend for whom I had always entertained the greatest respect, but whom I did not often see. Now in the general embroglio of the court proceedings her professional assistance was necessary. I had never met the lady except on business. I had never made a hat for her. It was from simple compassion that she gave me the key, explaining that it belonged to a little furnished house which she had, and which had been empty for some weeks. I was to use it and not worry about the rent until I got on my feet. 'Which I am sure you will,' she added.

On that black day, nothing, nothing could have cheered me more. I had got a roof over my head, but more, here was independence, and my pride rose. Of course, the rent

should be paid the first week. I looked at the tag attached to the key and, as I read it, I wondered if I were having hallucinations. *Bywater Street*, Chelsea. But that was the very street where I had had a house before, where I had lived for six years. The house where I had copied Schiaparelli's blue-and-white décor. Where I had fire-watched in the war years; where I had discovered the miracle of dehydrated potato. Where Susie first came into my life. Where at different times I had seen the faces of nearly all my friends. Where I knew most of the inhabitants of the other two dozen or so houses. The baker round the corner; the milkman and the butcher. This other house must be almost next door.

Incredible? But it was true. Wonderful? It was a miracle.

My ring and my wrist-watch had had to be handed over to the Official Receiver, but I took my suitcase down to the old familiar locality; the spot in all London where I felt most at home, and which in this dark hour represented heaven. It was truly lovely and I was truly grateful.

There is no nightmare like the nightmare of indecision. Though I was still dazed at the turn of Fortune's wheel, now that a course had been decided I felt a better man. Imponderable though the future might be, I had the feeling that somehow I should be able to forge an honourable way out of the tangle. Just for now, it was good to have shed some of the responsibilities and difficulties. My tired mind found refuge in merely directing my hands to manual things.

The little house had been rather neglected. It wanted a good clean and polish. It wanted some new paint. I bought the polish and the paint.

It was a tiny place, but surprisingly it had a telephone with an extension in every room. As there were still several odd ends to be tied up in my old Brook's Mews premises, I made known my new address and telephone number. The newspapers having broken the news of my fall, naturally enough a great many people got through to me next day.

Competitors telephoned to sympathize and to offer workroom space; to offer materials—whatever I could

suggest. Customers rang up to know what they could do to help. Model girls offered to do a stint and wait for payment.

I had already discussed things with my old work-girls. Some of them had promised to follow me wherever I set up. Now they offered to come right away. Friends telephoned, even acquaintances telephoned. I went to bed that first night feeling happier than I had felt for weeks.

The morning brought a pile of equally heartening letters thumping on to my diminutive doormat. Some had noble headings and some had ordinary ones, but all offered sympathy and understanding. I read them through with a lump in my throat and in my mind a stronger determination than ever.

It was Saturday and arriving on the heels of the post came help of muscle and brawn. Two young friends had come prepared to char for me. By no tenets, either British or Danish, could Sunday be faced without achieving some degree of order and cleanliness. The bathroom was scrubbed, the kitchen given a late spring-clean. The stairs had their first coat of new paint.

Some shopping had to be done, so I walked down to the 'village'. There was the same butcher who had served me throughout my earlier stay in Chelsea. In those days meat had been rationed but now he plunged his knife carelessly and hacked off a huge steak, slapping it straight on to a piece of greaseproof paper and parcelling it up. 'That's all right, Mr. Thaarup,' he said with gruff kindness, pushing the parcel across the scrubbed wooden bench.

The baker's lady said, 'We're sorry about your misfortune, but we are glad to have you back.' The milkman left a pint of milk. A neighbour sent in a pie. Two of my old fellow fire-watchers popped in. I was truly at home.

I had really enough on my hands for a bit; the house needed quite a lot more attention before I could feel settled. For of course I was going to make hats. Hats were my trade. They were my lifeline back to solvency.

My solicitor had already arranged the legal side of this. A sponsor had come forward and opened a small banking

account. The account would be in the sponsor's name, but any money I could earn would be paid into the account. Wages, rent, lighting, heating and materials would be paid out of this account and I was to have a few pounds a week to cover my personal living expenses and any surplus I earned was to accumulate towards settling my debts.

To be free of big worries, to have had all those moving proofs of friendship and loyalty; to have a little house to play with and enough money to cover my simple needs, and even to be able to ask a friend to share a glass of wine, was indeed bliss.

There was another aspect of the whole affair which necessarily I have left unpainted. One does not always understand the people with whom one works even after a decade. Undoubtedly I had been spending too much money, not always selfishly on myself, though clearly even to give money away is a form of indulgence. But I do not attempt to exonerate myself.

Business did not take long before catching up on me. On Sunday morning I went downstairs to take a look at the outside of the house and con over its enchanting possibilities. In front of the house was a very tiny garden, let us say two by eight feet. It stood a little away from the wall of the house and was enclosed by a concrete surround. Somewhere on the paving was a dustbin.

I was wearing jeans and a shirt with a scarf tucked in; for once the crooked bow tie which is almost my 'trade-mark' to the photographers and the journalists was missing. I was far from 'dapper'. If someone had come up and asked me if 'the guv'nor' was at home, I should not have been surprised.

What happened was very different. Standing on the edge of the pavement and peering up at my walls and windows, I had not noticed an opulent Rolls-Royce drawing up. Out of it tumbled three young girls calling 'Mr. Thaarup', and after them a woman I recognized. She was an old customer, an American lady, and the three young girls were her grandchildren. They had read about me, and now, on their

way to church, had stopped to call on me—and to order a hat apiece! They filed in, up the narrow staircase into a little ‘through’ room which I was planning to make a hat-fitting room. I had only a few yards of sparra, a length or two of velvet and a little heap of hoods to show them, but they were not deterred. That morning I took an order for four hats; it was the first time I had ever done business on a Sunday. And it was my first order under the new régime.

The next fortnight was a queer mixture. I had two of my old work-girls sitting in the little work-cum-fitting room and my faithful secretary in the little two-by-four office. The latter did a dozen jobs from answering the telephone, putting the kettle on for steaming the hoods, typing letters and running errands. During the day I designed hats and in the evening got down to furniture shifting, painting and distemping.

There were things that made me laugh; things that made me cry. And things that made me wonder.

Making me laugh was the absurdity of this little house. You go in a door with a five-foot-square hall. On the left is a room four by three; it just takes a desk with a typewriter and a chair. The overflow of papers go down on the floor. The hall has a cushioned bench seat and immediately to the right is the staircase, so steep and so narrow that you have to be quite careful how you negotiate it. Up on the little landing there is a south window where the sun pours in; to the right a kitchen with a sink, a dresser, a table and a refrigerator. To the left is the ‘through’ room where the two work-girls sit, and leading out of it my sitting-room. Further upstairs is a bathroom and a bedroom. In each room there are wide windows; from some you can see the busy life of the King’s Road, for the house is right on the corner. The others look down on to the quiet cul-de-sac of Bywater Street.

One might have supposed that some of my old customers would have despised this little retreat. But no, they came like bees to a honey-pot. Fate laughed with me.

When the ponderous proceedings of the law slowly

squashed my last lingering hopes of reducing my debts to manageable proportions I wept. Naturally I had left behind me a lot of stock. As generally happens in this kind of case it went for a 'song'! Some went to wholesalers, some was sold to the old business.

One particular lot of model hats went to a Kensington store and was widely advertised. The rush to snap these up at bargain prices was such that the poor 'buyer' was nearly crushed to death. Describing the scene, she told reporters that it was the most fantastic morning's sale that she had ever witnessed. 'The customers seemed to rise out of the floor,' she said. 'I borrowed assistants from all over the store, but still I had not enough.'

Well, it had to be. At least there must be a lot of unaccustomed heads proudly disporting 'Thaarup' models around the suburbs.

But every day there was cause for wonder. I got the little concrete surround of the garden whitewashed and the earth dug over, then, coming down one morning, I found a beautiful chrysanthemum blooming where before there had been only bare brown earth. I still do not know who planted it.

I worked at that little house. The carpet inside was plum coloured, which made a good beginning. The stairs up to the first floor could have pale lime edges and skirting boards. The workroom should be white, my sitting-room should have blue walls and white paint. I got some plum-and-white-striped curtains and some new cushion covers. Little white wire pot-holders with pots overflowing with greenery which were given me were distributed round the house. I hung a framed sampler of embroidery, a treasure from my mother's youth. Then I started on the outside of the house. With some scaffolding, and with the help of a friend, I whitewashed the whole wall. A new coat of black paint on the front door, a few more flowers in the garden and I stepped back to review it. It had all been done on 'six-pence' but a dog in a kennel or a millionaire in his palace could scarcely have felt prouder.

It was late summer now, and I worked in my little office or in the workroom or the sitting-room quite informally clad in dark trousers and a white shirt. Thus to have shed formality, yet still to be able to carry on with my creative work was having a wonderful effect. I slept like a top and ate like a horse—or anyway like a small pony. I loved my surroundings, and I loved the friendly atmosphere they engendered. Perhaps it was a bit of sentimentalism but I saw the new set-up as a revival of the old-time order of things. I had imbibed so often at the fount of stories my old grandfather told that I easily pictured the old life. My grandfather had been a shoemaker, and had had the honour of making shoes for Queen Alexandra in her young, single days as a Danish Princess. In those days the apprentices would live in the house with the master and would sit down at table with him.

Perforce, that was something of the picture in my little house. At one o'clock we all sat down to lunch. There might only be tomatoes and salad and eggs, but we shared them. And afterwards we shared the tidying and got back to work again, much the same as they still do in old Continental businesses.

One of the pleasantest letters of sympathy which I received was from a well-known woman journalist. With it was an invitation from eight or nine other journalists and fashion editors. Would I lunch with them at the Ladies' Press Club? The club is only half a minute away from the Bankruptcy Court, and they had chosen the day of my public examination. I should have only a step to go. And have much to say.

As it transpired the examination was postponed, but the ladies insisted on my keeping the engagement with them. They were ladies who had come to my shows, who had reported on my hats with wit and with wisdom; impartially and irreproachably. This was simply a gesture of kindness and, I like to think, confidence in me. I appreciated it deeply.

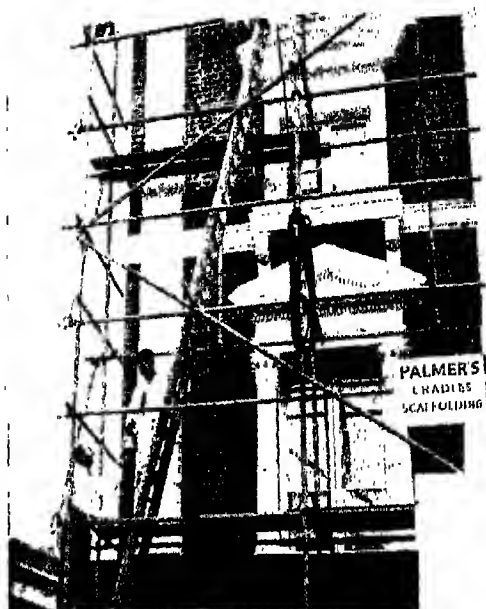
The public examination took place some weeks later; the staggering sum of my debts was known. Till now, I had



*A lesson with 'Coconut Willy' in Honolulu*



*The scaffolding goes  
up round the new  
house in Chelsea*



*A friend's help  
aloes it a new show*

not clearly seen where I was going. I just knew that I had to make hats, and somehow make money. And already I was doing that. Already it was necessary to employ some outside workers, for there was too much work for the two who worked with me. I could afford to make hats now for several guineas less than when working in a West End house, with its large overhead expenses. But I do not think it was that which drew the customers. Some came to see my little house, some came out of loyalty. Perhaps a few, a very few, came out of curiosity. But most came quite simply because they liked the hats I made for them. I say this shamelessly. Would it not be nonsense to pretend?

It was a good season. A season for hats. For the first time in two decades instead of getting smaller, hats were getting bigger. There was width, height and depth for the milliner to play with. It meant a greater variety of hats; and even more, it meant greater scope for artifice.

There is no lady so beautiful that she can dispense with flattery. If she is so outstandingly a beauty, she surely likes to have her good looks stressed. But bricks cannot be made without straw, and a milliner cannot conjure flattery from nothing. I bid the half-hats and the snoods a cheerful good-bye, and let my fingers and my heart and my eyes spell out these new things. No matter if there were too much forehead or too little forehead. No matter if the nose were too prominent or the face too thin or the chins too many. No matter if the hips had swelled or the feet were too large, there was a hat that would help. A hat that would take the eye, and fade out the less attractive.

Perhaps I seem to romance. But picture the late 1955 silhouette. Slim as a lath from the waist down but gradually widening out above. Wrap a bulky stole round the top and add a 'pin' head, then see what happens to the feet. Add a *hat* above the wide top and automatically the feet shrink away.

You cannot lay down many rules about hats, but there is perhaps one which is quite irrefutable. Eyes are very susceptible to flattery by a hat. There were now casques, wide

hats, high hats and drum-like hats. And how enormously appealing anyone could make the eyes beneath. There were, of course, still some smaller hats, but even these had the difference that one put the head inside them, instead of wearing them perched atop.

Selling hats is a strange business. Sometimes it is flattery one is selling, sometimes it is just fashion. Sometimes it is fine materials and workmanship that a customer esteems. The sales that I like most are those where I know that tucked away in the hat-box or in the lining of the hat, the customer will find what she has been seeking. It may be courage, hope, assurance or new faith in herself. If I think she will find any one of these I am triumphantly satisfied.

Apropos of this I am reminded of one of the most valued compliments of my life. It was paid me by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother on the occasion of a visit she had made to receive the Freedom of the City of London. I happened to be at Clarence House on this day bringing with me some other hats. With that spontaneous graciousness for which she is so famous, the Queen Mother handed me her bouquet of red roses to give to my work-girls, remarking that her hat had given her much confidence and pleasure.

It was a charming compliment, and it made me very happy. But it made me wonder, too. How many ladies ever pause to consider what lies behind royalty's choice of clothes? Or at the task these must represent? Or bow to the ineffable grace with which the royal ladies fulfil this responsibility?

The question of hats for royal ladies is one which is often discussed. As with any hat, one of the first principles is that it should be comfortable enough for the wearer to be able to forget about it, but charming enough to be remembered with pleasure by those who see it. But there is another rule. Whereas clothes for royal ladies are always made in colours which are distinctive enough not to merge into the background against which they will be seen, hats, on the contrary, must not obtrude too obviously.

The hat must be becoming, it must have charm of its own. Further, from my point of view, it must have a *motif*. The hat with no distinct idea is a helpless hat.

Remembering all those things is comparatively easy when making a hat for Mrs. Smith. All the stratagem of dipping and waving brim, half-concealing petal or petersham or veil can be deployed. But in making a hat for a royal lady one has to bear in mind the need for the royal face to be visible from every angle. And still the hat must be contemporary, must reflect what is piquant or attractive in current fashion; and it must accord with the royal ladies' personal taste. What an exciting challenge! But I have enjoyed meeting it, and enjoyed making every hat which has gone to royalty.

In my new domain I was soon kept busy all the time. But, though I was working hard, how I enjoyed the less trammelled life. There is something about Chelsea which I find very satisfying. It is part of London Town, but at the same time it has a curious regional quality of its own. Somehow it is a homogeneous little whole with as much character as a country village. Nowhere do you see bonnier babies being wheeled in their prams, nowhere prettier young mothers. There is a lot of 'through' traffic along the King's Road, but beneath it is a cohesive group of local life. The butcher, the baker, the little café and the man who sells bananas and hot chestnuts from a barrow are all pillars supporting the life of the neighbourhood.

To be an individual belonging to this group is something better than being a nameless shadow. As I licked my stamps in the local Post Office the charming wife of the postmaster would give me a cheerful, 'Good morning, *Mr. Thaarup*.' The girl in the cleaners would remark that it was 'a nice day for hats'. Down at the local cinema I could get an excellent seat for two shillings and threepence, and a hint about a good film that the manager had up his sleeve for next month.

There is an old saying that if you sell good shoes, though

your house is in the middle of a wood people will make a path to your door.

I will not pretend that every taxi that draws up outside my doll's house has come there undirected; but certainly to some, the little black door and yellow flowers are already familiar. I had not been down Chelsea way long before two very old friends looked me up. Elsie and Doris Waters, of stage and radio fame, came in for two hats, and to ask me if I would appear on a television programme with them. Over the years I had often made hats for these two charming ladies. The rule has always been that the hats should be made from similar materials but in different shapes and with different trimming. I remember two particular hats which I made in a great hurry for a garden party. They were large hats and had some rather extravagant and beautiful ribbon bows on them. Before packing the hats, little screwed-up balls of tissue were hidden in the folds of the ribbon so that the bows should not crush. Unaware of this, the two ladies had put the hats straight on, just before going to the party, but as soon as they arrived the screws of tissue started to fall out. One by one they scattered like snowballs round their feet. It needed a sense of humour to make a good joke of it.

It was wonderfully bracing to know that old customers still thought enough of my work to come down to Chelsea for a 'kitchen made' hat. That was not all. There were invitations to do the hats for one or two couture dress shows. For a fur show, and for a charity dress show. All nice compliments.

But I had a mountain yet to climb. For though my new premises had been enough to give me refuge, and enable me to keep in touch with old customers, I knew that they were not adequate for the job in front of me. There would have to be something else, too. I had not long to wait before proposals offering greater prospects were put before me. Proposals which I hope, not long after this book appears, will send my hats circling the world again. And take me substantially nearer my goal.

Only today a difficult customer climbed my stairs. She was nice-looking, but one of those people who think of a hat's shape but neglect to be critical of its effect on them. She wanted a hat she had seen in some glossy fashion magazine. It was quite a charming hat but not the hat for this lady. I did my best to show her what a different shape would do for her. I must have been on form that day. A couple of window-cleaners on their ladders outside chuckled.

'D'you 'ear that, Bert?' said one. 'There's sales talk for yer. 'Ow the 'ell did 'e ever go broke?'

If I impress these chaps, I thought, it is a good omen.

Another old customer came to fit a hat, and over a cup of tea in my sitting-room we talked of other days. The hundreds, the thousands, probably the millions of hats for which I had been responsible. Which was my favourite hat amongst them all?

The rumble of buses came up faintly from the King's Road. The afternoon sun flickered through the window, making slow patterns on the walls. I saw cloche hats and picture hats. I saw huge cartwheel hats and tiny Edwardian things. Hats big with plumes, and hats as unsubstantial as sugar icing. I saw 'five-o'clock tea' hats floating on clouds of tulle. Berets and bowlers and bretons and sailors.

I loved this one; and I loved that one. But my favourite? I pondered.

'Ma'am,' I said at last. 'My favourite hat—is the hat I am going to make tomorrow!'

